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Rheumatology capacity building for health care providers in Uganda: an ILAR project report

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Abstract:

Introduction: The burden of rheumatological diseases in Uganda is unknown. Availability of rheumatologic services is limited with patients presenting late.

Objective: The program set out to improve rheumatology disease knowledge in diagnosis, patient care, and clinical examination among health care providers.

Method: Using an educational curriculum adopted for medical residents and community-based/generalist physicians, we trained over 395 doctors. Through online webinars, ten lectures focusing on topics such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), rheumatoid arthritis (RA), osteoarthritis (OA), infectious arthritis, gout/crystalline arthritis, osteoporosis, and an overview of joint disease and autoimmunity to increase awareness and improve diagnosis and management of RMDs among healthcare providers in Uganda and east Africa were delivered. We assessed the training to ascertain learning with pre- and post-test assessments conducted with real-time analyses. Analysis of changes in knowledge performance was conducted and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: Across the sessions with data available, post-session correct response rates were higher than pre-session rates for nearly all questions. The most pronounced improvements were observed in Session 2 (Osteoarthritis), where the absolute increases in correct responses ranged from 40 to 72% (all $P < 0.001$).

Conclusions: Our project utilized a successful model of providing professional rheumatologic training and health education to healthcare providers in resource limited settings. It also lays foundations for short- and long-term medical education in rheumatology and raising public awareness of rheumatic diseases. Key Points • Successful professional rheumatologic training and health education models can be used to improve rheumatology knowledge to healthcare providers in resource limited settings. • Developing a rheumatology registry is critical in bridging a critical information gap in Uganda for research, surveillance and clinical

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care. · Improving health care providers' rheumatology knowledge improves early referrals and disease diagnosis.

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