ORL - HNS Training in South Africa

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Abstract

An out line of the scheme of training specialists in Otorhinolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (ORL - HNS) in South Africa is given and the difference with Indian training discussed

Keywords Otorhinolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery Training • South Africa.

Introduction

South Africa has many similarities with India - a large, multicultural, multilingual population, coexisting public (State run) and private medical care, with only a small percentage of the total population able to afford the latter. The public health care system faces resource constraints just as it does here. As such, comparisons between ORL - HNS training in South Africa and India may lead to ideas for improvement, which may be easily adaptable to local conditions. Although the description that follows is specific to the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, the general scheme is the same throughout South Africa.

Medical Education

There are seven Medical Schools in South Africa, each attached to one of the provincial Universities. Students apply to the School of their choice, and are called for an interview depending upon their Matriculation results. The undergraduate course is of six years duration, of which the first three years are pre and para -clinical, while the next three years are devoted to the clinical subjects. The Medical School of the University of Cape Town is run by the Faculty

of Health Sciences, and awards the degree of MB ChB. The newly qualified graduate has to complete a year as an intern (House Officer), usually at the Teaching Hospital, and a further year as a Community Service Doctor, usually at one of the Rural Day Hospitals (the South African equivalent of our Primary Health Centres) before he/she can obtain full registration with the South African Medical Council.

Staffing Pattern

The two Teaching Hospitals of the University of Cape Town are Groote Schuur Hospital (for adults) and Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital. The Department of Otolaryngology has two Professors (one being the Head of the Department), a full time Senior specialist, a full time Specialist, three part time Senior specialists and three part time Specialists. The part time faculty do one or two OPD sessions a week, and some of them also do one half-day Theatre session a week. Although they help teach the undergraduates in the Clinic, they do not have much of a role in specialist (post graduate) training.

Academic Facilities

The Department at Groote Schuur has its own seminar room, which comfortably seats 25 to 30 people, and has facilities for Overhead and Slide projection. This is used for student teaching and clinical meetings. The Registrars have a room for their own academic use, with ample desk space and four computers with printers and multimedia capability. The Departmental library is reasonably stocked with textbooks and receives the major international ORL-HNS journals. The University Medical Library is situated across the road from the Hospital.

Undergraduate ORL - HNS

Eighteen undergraduate medical students are attached to the Department of Otolaryngology for two weeks at a time. They attend daily tutorials (taken by either the Professors or the Registrars); attend the OPD and Operating Theatre. They are

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divided into groups of three, each group being assigned to a Registrar. Each group is given a particular topic (e.g. acute otitis media) on which they have to make a presentation to their Registrar towards the end of their attachment. Halfway through the attachment the students are taken on a field trip by one of the Professors and two Registrars, where they visit two Rural Day Hospitals to coquet Ear clinics, staying overnight at a suitable guest house.

At the end of the their attachment the students have to take an OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination), on which they are graded. These grades go towards their final examination marks. There is no separate Otolaryngology paper in the final MB examination; a related question may be set in the General Surgery paper. Interestingly, the students also fill in an assessment form regarding the teaching ability of the Registrars.

Higher Surgical Training in ORL - HNS

The postgraduate qualification in any surgical specialty in South Africa is the F.C.S. (Fellowship of the College of Surgeons). This has three parts. Candidates may appear for the Primary PCS examination as soon as they complete their Registration. Most doctors wishing to specialise in a surgical stream take up a twelve-month post as Medical Officer in general surgery at a District or Teaching Hospital. With a years experience in general surgery, and the Primary PCS, they can now apply for a Registrar job in ORL - HNS. The Registrar rotation in ORL - HNS is for four years. Vacancies are advertised by the various Teaching Hospitals, and the applicants are called for interviews, on the basis of which they are selected.

Once the trainee is in a Registrar post, with twelve months experience in general surgery, three months experience in ICU and three months experience in ORL - HNS he/she may appear for the Intermediate PCS examination, which is a basic para-clinical sciences paper. The Final PCS examination may be taken in the third year of the Registrar rotation. It consists of four written papers in ORL - HNS. Trainees who successfully pass the written papers are called for a viva voce and clinical examination six weeks later.

There are eight Registrars attached to the Department of Otolaryngology at Cape Town. Three years of the rotation are spent at Groote Schuur Hospital, two separate periods of three and six months each at Red Cross Hospital, and three months with the Maxillo - facial Unit at Groote Schuur Hospital. Due to financial constraints, the Department at Groote Schuur at present has only nineteen beds and one dedicated Operating Theatre, with three whole day lists and two half day lists each week (when the New Groote Schuur Hospital was opened in 1991 the Department had 64 beds and two dedicated Theatres with two whole day lists every day).

In the OPD the Registrars see the follow up patients, while new patients are seen by one of the Specialists. All patients attending the Teaching Hospitals have to be referred from the District Hospitals, with a definite appointment. In Theatre the Registrars

begin by assisting the Specialists in the various operations, and are gradually allowed to perform procedures under supervision. On the ward each patient is assigned to a particular Registrar, and it is his/her responsibility to clerk the initial history, keep the case notes up to date, arrange all necessary investigations and treatment.

There is a ward round every morning at 7.30am by the Professor and Head with all the Registrars, at which the condition of every patient is discussed and decisions regarding further management are made. One of the Specialists, and sometimes the Head, also goes round with the Registrars at 4.30pm. There are standard management protocols for all common ORL - HNS conditions, which are updated every year by the faculty, so that a uniform standard of care is available for all patients.

There are separate monthly Pathology and Radiology meetings, at which interesting histopathology and imaging of the previous month is discussed with colleagues of the respective departments. Journal club meetings are held once a month, and the department has a scheduled Temporal Bone dissection day every six months. There is a joint clinical meeting held with the Department of Otolaryngology of Tygerberg Hospital (the Teaching Hospital of Stellenbosch University). The venue alternates between the two departments, and the Registrars present two or three interesting cases for discussion at these meetings. Every Friday a joint Head and Neck clinic is held with colleagues from Radiology, Pathology, Radiotherapy, Plastic Surgery and Palliative care. All patients with Head and Neck malignancies are seen at this clinic, and treatment decisions arrived at by the multi-specialty team.

Discussion

Otorhinolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery has expanded far beyond its original boundaries of the Ear, Nose and Throat, and it is important that trainees receive a broad based grounding in the subject. Unlike our three-year M.S and two-year D.L.O. programs, there is a single, four year training program in South Africa, in the course of which the trainees are rotated through Paediatric ORL - HNS and a major allied specialty - Maxillo-facial surgery.

They are also assigned definite undergraduate teaching responsibilities, and are assessed regarding their teaching enthusiasm and ability by their students. Assignment of ward patients to a particular trainee, who will be responsible for their treatment from admission to discharge, allows trainees to attain a comprehensive understanding of patient management. Regular interaction with colleagues from other specialties, through the various meetings and clinics, inculcates the concept of the multi-specialty approach to patients with Head and Neck lesions. Every country has its own system of specialist training in Medicine, and each system has its strengths and weaknesses. Appreciation of different systems of training may generate ideas, which we may incorporate into our own training program. Differences between training in Otorhinolaryngology - Head and Neck surgery (ORL - HNS) in India and Europe or the United

States are magnified by the obvious resource gap between Third and First world countries. As a medical student in Cape Town said to the author, South Africa is a Third world country with a First world healthcare system. This is the result of the combination of a strong training program, a well-equipped network of Rural Day Hospitals, and excellent tertiary referral centres that efficiently utilise the available resources.

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