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Urologists and Global Health

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The authors of this epidemiological study performed a sub-analysis of the 2012 Surgeons OverSeas Assessment of Surgical need (SOSAS) survey. This robust study was developed to assess the prevalence of surgical conditions in Sierra Leone. The parent study revealed a large unmet need for the treatment of basic surgical conditions in this low-income country. In the current manuscript, the authors study 1,054 men over the age of 12 and found that the period and point prevalence of gross hematuria and urinary retention indicate a large demand for urological care in this developing country. The authors cite lack of urological expertise, geographic limitations, financial limitations and suboptimal surgical infrastructure as reasons for this burden. By virtue of this investigation, the authors of this study have successfully quantified a concerning disease burden in one country, which can likely be generalized to many developing countries.

However, once identified, it is also important for urologists from resource rich countries to take an active role in developing sustainable ways to reduce the burden of disease. For example, urological staff from the University of Michigan recently travelled to Ghana as part of a new collaboration between the university and local hospitals in the West African country. On one hand, the experience was transformative and educational for the U.S. staff in the sense that they were exposed to uncommon pathology such as end-stage renal failure and squamous cell bladder cancer secondary to schistosomiasis. On the other hand, in a country of where there is one urologist for every 3.5 million individuals, the Ghanaian physicians reaped the long-lasting benefits of surgical instruction from their U.S. counterparts. Endoscopic management of urolithiasis was the focus of this recent trip, but many other educational opportunities (for both parties) were identified.

Through the research of urologic disease in the developing world and development of international collaborations, U.S. urologists can use their exceptional training and resources to promote the health of a global population in need of urological care.