

Advancing Dermatology Education and Care in Rwanda: The Impact of a New Academic Partnership

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Dear Editor,

This past spring the inaugural class, now fifth-year medical students, at The University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) in Butaro, Rwanda entered their sub-specialty training in Dermatology. UGHE is the result of visionary leadership from the late Dr. Paul Farmer and Partners in Health (PIH), the Cummings Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It is the realization of a long-dreamed aspiration to create a university that would advance global health delivery by training a new generation of global health leaders who are equipped to not just build, but sustain effective and equitable health systems.

While PIH has many academic partners, creating an academic institution dedicated to health equity located in an environment where health disparities are most acutely felt was the ultimate goal. Students at UGHE, through a rigorous selection process, will complete a six-and-a-half-year program eventually obtaining a joint Medical Degree and Masters of Global Health where upon graduation, the students serve at least six years in a public district hospital as a doctor for a vulnerable population. UGHE's classes are purposefully 2/3 female to address gender inequality and the tuition is free. The graduating classes of 2025 and 2026 are entirely Rwandan but the following classes include students from Uganda, Burundi, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Malawi, and Liberia with the intent to train future physicians who will be leaders and serve populations all over Africa.

Though Rwanda has a population of 13 million, there are only 12 registered board-certified dermatologists in the entire country, all of whom are located in the capital city of Kigali. Thus, the graduates must be equipped with sufficient dermatologic skills to diagnose and treat common conditions and understand when to refer from their respective rural communities. After three years of development, the dermatology curriculum commenced at UGHE with great success. In planning the dermatology clerkship and needing to teach the students on-site in Butaro, a dermatology clinic was established at Butaro District Hospital-

FIGURE 1. Dr. Ariel Eber demonstrates dermatologic procedural skills including biopsies, excisions, and bedside diagnostics on site at the campus of UGHE.



the teaching site of UGHE. In doing so, dermatologic care was newly made available to the northern province, a community of 1.2 million, who previously had to travel over two hours to Kigali. A new wing in the Butaro District Hospital has been built and opened in late 2023. The Hospital leadership has recognized the need to expand dermatology care and is building a small dermatology clinic space in this new hospital.

Visiting faculty from partner institutions this year traveled from across the United States for a week at a time to teach the incredibly inspiring and eager students of UGHE alongside local dermatologist Dr. Jean Bosco Ndagijimana. There are also over 15 virtual faculty. Currently, UGHE is inviting volunteer senior Residents, Fellows, and Board-certified Dermatologists for the Spring 2024 clerkship. There are opportunities to participate virtually or in person. Support for this clerkship has been generously provided by both the American Academy of Dermatology and Galderma.

DISCLOSURES

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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