

Wits joins network to expand paediatric care in Africa

There's a critical shortage of child-health providers in Africa. Without an adequate number of trained experts, it's difficult to make a significant difference in the way a country's healthcare system can respond to the needs of infants and children.



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Therefore, says Professor Ashraf Coovadia, academic head of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health in the School of Clinical Medicine in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Wits, the department has joined the African Paediatric Fellowship Programme (APFP).

The APFP is a programme dedicated to training African paediatric doctors and post-graduate nurses. It provides training and clinical experience in top-ranking African universities and hospitals.

The programme works closely with ministries of health and 33 partner universities from 13 African countries, who select candidates for the programme, pay their salaries while in training and ensure there are positions available to them upon completion.

Wits and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) joined APFP in May 2018 to enable the training of 150 paediatric specialists in the next three years. The University of Cape Town, which joined APFP in 2008, has trained 151 paediatric specialists over the past 10 years.

There is less than one paediatrician per 100,000 children in Africa, compared to an estimated 99 paediatricians per 100,000 children in the United States. Support from the APFP has improved these figures: There were four paediatricians in Malawi in 2009 – eight years later, there are 15 paediatricians, including the country's first neonatologist and 94 qualified specialist children's nurses.

APFP fellows are primarily returning to the public health system, where the need for child health professionals is the greatest. This collaboration has resulted in 98% of graduates remaining in their home country, leading the delivery of high-quality child health services, training and research.

Donor funding covers tuition, professional fees and living expenses for the fellows during their training. Funders to date include The ELMA Foundation, Harry Crossley Foundation, Vitol Foundation, and The Red Cross Children's Hospital Trust.

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