

Title: Establishing medical education unit under the medical faculty of Jimma University, Ethiopia

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Context and setting: The medical faculty of Jimma University (JU), located 335km South West of Addis Ababa, is Ethiopia's first innovative community oriented educational institution of higher learning that was established in 1983. In the last 10 years, the faculty has shown a rapid growth and currently it has 21 departments which provide trainings to medical and paramedical students.

Why the idea/change was necessary: The teaching and assessment method at JU follow traditional approach with a curriculum that has not adapted to more modern educational techniques. Most of the faculties are young graduates who joined as teachers but with no adequate preparation to work as teachers. Moreover, the progressively increasing number of students is creating more challenges.

Thus, there is an urgent need for the faculty to overcome this challenge in medical education and initiate reforms. Accordingly, the MEU can help improve the situation by creating, organizing and coordinating a sustainable system that will enable the medical faculty at JU to continuously improve the quality of medical education.

The MEU will provide educational leadership to raise the standards of medical education at JU by creating a system for continuous faculty development programs; by introducing proven best practices in teaching and assessment approaches; ensuring regular updating and standardization of the curriculum; monitoring the teaching-learning process closely for continuous improvements; and promoting a culture of educational research.

What was done: The process of establishing an MEU had to follow the normal procedure of the University for endorsement. The academic commission of the medical faculty reviewed the project proposal and decided to proceed with its establishment in January 2010. In February 2010, the decision of the faculty was submitted to the vice president for authorization who in turn forwarded the project proposal to the highest management committee of the University in March 2010 for final decision. The management committee held its meeting in July 2010 and decided to consider the establishment of an MEU in December 2010 after reviewing the new structure of the University.

After this decision, as a result of my repeated formal and informal communication with the vice presidents of the University, they reacted positively to the proposal and supported moving the project forward as soon as possible. I also met with the president of the University who was enthusiastic about establishing an MEU and wanted to be informed of the progress of the developments.

Specific accomplishments:

1. Ten prospective members of the MEU received trainings on teaching skills and instructional design. These instructors in turn trained 65 faculties from medical, nursing, laboratory and pharmacy schools on teaching skills and objective structured clinical examination.
2. Four faculties from nursing and medical schools were also trained on simulation center management.
3. Space was dedicated for opening a simulation center for medical and nursing students that will be run by the MEU.
4. To benchmark reputable MEU, the dean of the faculty visited the MEU at Suez Canal University, Egypt.
5. To achieve all these resource intensive accomplishments, financial and material support was provided by Jhpiego, a partner organization.

6. Arrangements were made to visit the MEU at Jefferson medical college in Philadelphia this fall.

Challenges:

The multi-layered organizational structure of the University and the major re-structuring that was going on focused more on merging offices than creating a new one were big challenges. Moreover, establishing such a new office required the involvement of several higher officials of the University who were involved with other obligations making it difficult to talk to them and conduct meetings as planned.

Next steps:

To realize the implementation of the project proposal, strengthening the formal and informal communication with key decision makers and mobilizing more resources from partner organizations will be given priority. In the mean time, technical assistance will be provided to train more faculties on teaching skills, setting up the simulation center and introduction of best practices in assessment, like objective structured clinical examination, to the clinical departments.

Evaluation of results or impact: The project proposal to an organized MEU was successfully communicated with the university leadership who welcomed this concept. Accordingly, early results were seen to establish the MEU as a center of progressive medical education. Owing to the acceptance of the concept of an MEU and support given by the faculty, some of the tasks of the unit were carried out even before its official establishment.