

Cluster review of the Offshore medical universities in the Caribbean

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Background

- In the Caribbean, medical universities can be categorized as either regional or offshore. Regional medical universities are the institutions predominantly training students seeking to practice medicine in a Caribbean country. Offshore medical universities refers to institutions targeting students seeking to practice medicine in North America.
- The student population of the offshore medical universities is mainly comprised of students that failed to gain admittance into a North American university due students having low scores on the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)

Objective

- In this study, I reviewed the offshore medical university cluster in the Caribbean. The objectives of this study are to:
- i) present an overview of the offshore medical university cluster in the Caribbean;
- ii) review the challenges experienced in the cluster;
- iii) present strategies to address the challenges;
- and iv) present strategies that can lead to the increase in the contribution of offshore medical universities in the host country.

Overview

- The offshore medical universities were developed by entrepreneurs who saw a demand for tertiary level medical education in North America that could not be met domestically. Some entrepreneurs sought to meet this demand by establishing medical universities in the Caribbean. Some reason for targeting the Caribbean include:
- The region is in relative close geographic proximity to North America;
- The desired language of instruction for US students is English.
- The requirements for establishing a medical university in the Caribbean is significantly lower than in the US;
- It is less expensive to establish a medical university in the Caribbean than in the US;
- A business license is the only regulatory requirement in many Caribbean countries to form a medical school. No research is required. In the US, medical universities face finance and academic regulations.

Overview

Table 1

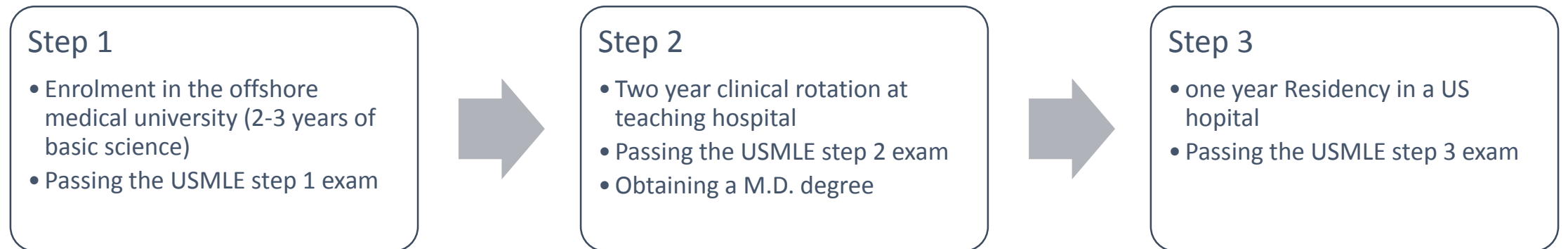
Country	Number of medical schools
Anguilla	1
Antigua and Barbuda	2
Dominica	2
Grenada	1
Montserrat	3
St. Kitts and Nevis	8
St. Lucia	8
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	5
Total OECS	30
Aruba	2
Curacao	4
Saba	1
Total Netherlands Antilles	7
T&T	1
Jamaica	2
Guyana	5
Dominican Republic	16
Belize	11
Total other Caribbean	35
Total	72

As of July 2015, there were seventy two (72) medical universities in the Caribbean, offering programs leading to an award the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and/or Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degrees.

The Caribbean offshore medical universities are all private, for-profit institutions. Some of the medical universities are owned by large corporations, such as R3 Education, Inc., DeVry, Inc. , and Manipal Education Americas, LLC. . The other Caribbean offshore medical universities are owned and managed by individuals or small organizations.

Process to obtain a MD from an offshore university

Figure 1: United States Licensing Exam (USMLE) steps



Benefits

- Some of the financial benefits include:
- Corporate and student taxes paid by the medical universities and their enrolled students;
- Income tax paid by the faculty staff in the medical universities;
- Tariffs charged upon imported products;
- Expenditure by students and faculty staff on accommodation, living expenses, and entertainment.

Benefits

- Other benefits include:
- Increased access to medical education for the few home country students.
- Increase in employment opportunity for some of citizens in the host country.
- Support of the local health care system in the host country. Some offshore medical universities may provide support to the local health care system by sending some of their students to undertake their clinical rotations in a local hospital.

Challenges

- There have been many reports that have expressed concerns about the quality of education offered by offshore medical universities in the Caribbean .
- some of the Caribbean offshore medical universities have inadequate faculty members, books, equipment and facilities. In the 1970s, some of these Caribbean offshore universities operated out of hotels, or doctor offices. There were also high dropout rates and students performed poorly on the USMLE step 1 examinations.

Challenges

Table 2: Performance at the USMLE step 1 examinations



Examinees from US/Canadian Schools	2013		2014	
	Number Tested	Percent Passing	Number Tested	Percent Passing
MD Degree	20,023	95%	20,394	95%
1st Takers	19,108	97%	19,582	96%
Repeaters	915	72%	812	68%
DO Degree	2,726	94%	2,846	93%
1st Takers	2,680	94%	2,810	93%
Repeaters**	46	74%	36	69%
Total	22,749	95%	23,240	95%
Examinees from Non-US/Canadian Schools	2013		2014*	
	Number Tested	Percent Passing	Number Tested	Percent Passing
1st Takers	14,649	79%	15,149	78%
Repeaters**	3,772	44%	2,889	38%
Total	18,421	72%	18,038	72%

^[1] Represents data for examinees tested in 2014 and reported through February 5, 2015.

^[2] 'Repeaters' represents examinations given, not number of examinees.

Challenges

- The teaching structure at the offshore medical universities is designed specifically to prepare students for the USMLE examinations. Such 'teaching to the test,' may not properly prepare IMGs for the rigors of a professional career in medicine.
- The teaching frequently occurs over the internet and through distance learning programs. Such teaching methodology runs contrary to the North American medical university model where attendance at lectures is mandatory.

Challenges

Table 3: Performance at the ECFMG certification

	Country	no. of awarded certificates	%
1	India	1,278	13.3%
2	Grenada	891	9.3%
3	Dominica	819	8.5%
4	Pakistan	568	5.9%
5	Saint Maarten	367	3.8%
6	Antigua and Barbuda	356	3.7%
7	Saint Kitts and Nevis	336	3.5%
8	Israel	211	2.2%
9	China	210	2.2%
10	Egypt	202	2.1%
Caribbean cluster			
1	Grenada	891	9.3%
2	Dominica	819	8.5%
3	Saint Maarten	367	3.85
4	Antigua and Barbuda	356	3.7%
5	Saint Kitts and Nevis	336	3.5%
6	Mexico	181	1.9%
7	Saba	156	1.6%
8	Cayman Islands	129	1.3%
9	Dominican Republic	122	1.3%
10	Cuba	67	0.7%

IMGs are required to achieve certification by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). The ECFMG requires IMGs to have passed USMLE step 1 and 2 examinations, and successfully completed their clinical rotations.

Challenges: accreditation

School Name	Status
All American Institute of Medical Sciences	Initial Provisional Accreditation
American University of Antigua (College of Medicine)	Accredited with Conditions, 2014-2017
Avalon University School of Medicine	Not Accredited
British International University (BIU)	Accreditation Withdrawn
Global University Schools of Medicine and Public Health (GU-MED)	Initial Provisional Accreditation Reinstated
Ross University School of Medicine	Accredited with Conditions, 2014-2018
Saint James School of Medicine, Anguilla	Initial Accreditation as a Developing School
Spartan Health Sciences University School of Medicine	Provisional Accreditation, 2013-2015
St. George's University (SGU) School of Medicine	Accredited with Conditions, 2011-2015
The University of the West Indies (UWI) School of Medicine	Accredited with Conditions, 2012-2016
University of Guyana School of Medicine	Provisional Accreditation, 2013-2015
University of Science, Arts and Technology (USAT)	Not Accredited
Vanguard University School of Medicine	Initial Provisional Accreditation
Windsor University School of Medicine, St. Kitts	Not Accredited
Xavier University School of Medicine	Provisional Accreditation, 2013-2015
The University of the West Indies (UWI) School of Veterinary Medicine	Accredited with Conditions, 2009-2015
The University of the West Indies School of Dentistry, Mona	Initial Provisional Accreditation
The University of the West Indies School of Dentistry, St Augustine	Accredited with Conditions, 2010-2014

- Some Caribbean offshore medical universities have never undergone any formal accreditation.
- UWI doctor of medicine (MD) program was initially accredited by the General Medical Council (GMC) of the United Kingdom. However, since 2001 the GMC was no longer able to accredit schools outside of the United Kingdom (UK). Subsequently the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) established the Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and other Health Professions (CAAM-HP) in 2003, to accredit CARICOM medical tertiary level institutions.

Challenges: accreditation

- The US Department of Education, through its National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation (NCFMEA) reviews the accreditation standards used by foreign countries and determine if such standards are comparable to the US standards.
- The NCFMEA recognizes only four Caribbean offshore medical universities as providing education that is equivalent to the US medical universities. These universities include:
 - St. George's Univ. School of Medicine, Grenada;
 - Ross University School of Medicine, Dominica;
 - American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine, St. Martin;
 - Saba University School of Medicine, Netherlands Antilles.
- Subsequently, US students attending such Caribbean offshore medical universities may access US federal loans.

Challenges

- The main concern that arises about the offshore medical university industry is questionable quality of education offered by the medical universities.
- The ECFMG is well aware of the quality of education offered by offshore medical universities. Subsequently it has announced that, effective in 2023, all physicians applying for ECFMG Certification will be required to graduate from a medical university that has been appropriately accredited.

Recommendations

- the CAAM-HP can also be used to address the quality of medical education.
- The economic contribution of the Caribbean offshore medical universities can be increased if more local staff (academic and administrative) are hire.
- Increase the intake of local students.
- Caribbean offshore medical universities can also increase their contribution to the economies of host countries by forming partnerships with regional hospitals to allow their student pursue their clinical rotations. When such students are training on their clinical rotations, they may increase the amount of health care services offered to citizens of the host country.

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- The end