

A NEW COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

East, Central and Southern Africa College of Physicians (ECSACOP)

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Background

It is evident that there is a shortage of doctors in sub-Saharan Africa. Statistics show that 25% of the world's disease burden occurs in Africa which has only 1.7% of the world's doctor population and accounts for 1% of the world's financial resources for health.^[1] All specialities in medicine are affected.

Objective

“The College aims to improve access to well-trained physicians across the region by establishing a network of dedicated training centres and implementing an internationally recognized postgraduate medical qualification. The college will ultimately improve health outcomes for the region's >200 million inhabitants, with a focus on expanding healthcare provision in centres serving the rural population.”

Training

The training curriculum will be delivered through an in-service, apprenticeship model in existing health facilities. Through this approach, ECSACOP will harmonise internal medicine training across the region, establishing regional standards and ultimately improving health outcomes for countless patients.

ECSACOP is a regional college (currently comprising Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) that seeks to contribute to the resolution of manpower shortages of physicians.^[2] ECSACOP is one of six constituent colleges of the ECSA College of Health Sciences which was established following a resolution passed at the 52nd Health Ministers Conference held in Harare, Zimbabwe 2010 (ECSA/HMC52/R9: Strengthening Partnerships for Health).

ECSACOP was officially inaugurated in 2015 and has thus far held three scientific and annual general meetings in Zimbabwe (2016), Uganda (2017) and Zambia (2019).

ECSACOP Award – the College awards Fellowship through instruction and examinations. Enrolled trainees participate in full-time instruction in approved training institutions.

The Fellowship (Part 1)

After the first two years, trainees should complete the FCP (Part 1) examination and be able to take responsibility for emergency medical admissions, deal with life-threatening situations resulting from a variety of causes and be able to diagnose and plan treatment for a variety of common and important medical conditions. The FCP (Part1) examination does not confer specialist status but qualifies a candidate to register for and pursue higher medical training.

The Fellowship (Final) examination leads to the qualification of Fellow of the East Central and Southern Africa College of Physicians, FCP (ECSA). This qualification is recognition that the candidate has reached the level of knowledge and practice of internal medicine sufficient to practice independently at a consultant or specialist level.

The holder of the FCP (ECSA) qualification is envisaged to be a physician who:

ECSACOP Award

Fellowship location	ECSACOP accredited training sites
Type of Fellowship	Full-time
Year of Commencement	September 2018
Length of Fellowship	4 years
Award	Fellow of the East, Central and Southern Africa College of Physicians
Designation of Award	FCP (ECSA)

1. Is specialized in all aspects of care of unselected general medical problems, in particular those that involve nonspecific symptoms, unusual presentations, multisystem disorders and complex multiple problems
2. Has an approach to practice that is strongly based on clinical skills and who applies technology in an appropriate, efficient and economical fashion, displays a high level of professionalism in his/her interaction with patients, their relatives, colleagues and the health system
3. Is capable of lifelong self-directed learning.

FELLOWSHIP/MEMBERSHIP

Founding Fellow

Any internal medicine physician registered as a specialist with a medical regulatory authority in the region shall be eligible to be a Founding Fellow (until such time as ECSACOP's first set of examinations occurs).

Ordinary Fellow

Any person trained as Internal Medicine specialist and who is certified by the College through its examination shall be eligible for Fellowship in the College.

Associate Fellow

An Associate Fellow shall be any registered Physician from outside the Region. They shall apply to Council for fellowship.

Honorary Fellow

An Honorary Fellow shall be any individual who has made substantial contributions to advancement of the mission and vision of the College. They need not be physicians. They shall be proposed by two College Fellows for consideration by the Council.

Corporate Member

A corporate member shall be any institution, organisation or business community of good standing and demeanour with an interest in internal medicine.

Ordinary Member

An ordinary member shall be any person currently enrolled in postgraduate training in internal medicine at the College.

PARTNERSHIPS

ECSA Health Community

The East, Central and Southern African Health Community (ECSA-HC) is an inter-governmental health organization that fosters and promotes regional cooperation in health among member states. Member states of the ECSA Health Community are Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Infectious Disease Institute, Uganda

ECSACOP's Secretariat is currently housed within IDI's HQ on the Makerere campus in Kampala, Uganda. ECSACOP benefits from IDI's expertise, networks and technical support. We also utilise IDI's financial, IT and human resource functions.

Royal College of Physicians (RCP), London

ECSACOP's principal partner throughout its inception phase has been the RCP (London). ECSACOP has benefitted enormously from both institutional and individual support across the organization.

National Associations of Physicians

The National Associations of Physicians in the six member states are the principal collaborators when it comes to the identification and recruitment of training sites and trainers, curriculum design, accreditation and quality control.

Status of ECSACOP 2020

ECSACOP was due to hold its first Part 1 examination in mid-2020, but this was deferred because of the COVID-19 pandemic. ECSACOP comprises 6 countries, but expansion to other East, Central and Southern African countries is the vision of the College. South Sudan should look forward to joining this promising College in the same way that it has now been integrated into the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA).

References

1. The World Health Report 2006 - Working together for health <https://www.who.int/whr/2006/en/>
2. College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA). <https://ecsacop.org/>