

MEDICAL EDUCATION

Arab Board for Medical Specialities: A Decade of Strifes and Strides

By Akbar Mohsin Mohammad*

ABSTRACT

On February 17, 1979 the By-laws of the Arab Board for Medical Specialities were approved by the Supreme Council representing seventeen Arab countries. Since then the Arab Board has made remarkable strides inspite of innumerable constraints, top of it comes the financial problem. Seventy one (71) hospitals in various Arab countries have been accredited following proper evaluation. One hundred twenty (120) programmes have been recognized for training toward certification in 4 major specializations, namely: General Surgery, Internal Medicine, Obstetrics/Gynaecology and Paediatrics (Table 1,2). Two hundred fully qualified and experienced physicians participate in the Scientific Councils to supervise and monitor the training programmes. Over 2700 physicians are enrolled in these programmes. A remarkable increase in enrollment (27%) was noted in 1988 registrants.

Graduation and Certification

Between 1984 and 1988, two hundred and twenty (220) physicians graduated and were certified in the four approved specializations. These graduates have been welcomed by their respective countries and were given a full recognition by employing them in

the hospitals and/or universities. Alternatively, some of these graduates were sent abroad for sub-specialization in fields of their choice tailored to meet needs of their countries.

The Arab Board certificate has been given full recognition by the participating Arab countries and it has been established as one of the speciality certificates required in appointing physicians as specialists in their fields. Moreover, some international educational health agencies, hospitals and universities became aware of the Arab Board, where they extended their recognition cautiously. External examiners also have participated in some of the final evaluations and have expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the assessment procedures. Although, the international recognition is not an absolute necessity, mutual respect of post-graduate educational Boards is highly desirable and may be considered a credit.

Success and Ambitions

Along with these strides came the need for recognizing other badly needed specializations, such as Family and Community Medicine, ENT, Pathology, Psychiatry and Ophthalmology to name just a few. In December 1985, the Supreme Council of the

Consultant & Chairman
Paediatric Department, Salmaniya Medical Centre
Associate Professor & Ag. Chairman
Division of Human Function, College of Medicine
& Medical Sciences, Arabian Gulf University

TABLE 1
Arab Board Statistics
(1979 - 1989)

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Number</i>
Participating Arab countries	17
Arab countries having current training programmes	10
Accredited Hospitals	71
Recognized Programmes	120
Current Active Scientific Councils:	5
Surgery, Internal Medicine, Obs/ Gynaecology, Paediatric and Family Practice / Community Practice	

TABLE 2
Enrollment, Examinations and Results
(1979 - 1989)

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Number</i>
Physicians enrolled	2700*
Physicians appeared for primary and/or final examinations (1981-1988)	2580
Passed examinations	1150
Certified (1984 - 1989)	220

Arab Board approved training programmes in these specialities, subject to the availability of the necessary funds. After 4 years of deliberations, the enrollment formalities in the Family and Community Medicine are underway and some training programmes have been given the green light.

Early this year the Supreme Council has approved training programme in a sub-speciality, namely Orthopaedics, but to remain with the administration of General Surgery Scientific Council. This stipulation was aimed at cutting costs. One cannot help

reflecting on the contradictory nature of this decision. At a time when the Arab Board is facing financial constraints the Supreme Council is conceding to demands of establishing new scientific councils or running sub-speciality training programmes. It is mandatory that the financial backing be secured and unpaid dues be collected. It is also crucial that full financial support be continued so that the councils move forward to accomplish their goals.

The Arab Board has been a rare bright star in the sky of the Pan-Arab undertakings over the past decades. Besides generating highly specialized Arab physicians, against fairly reasonable expenditures, the Arab Board by accrediting hospitals has contributed substantially towards upgrading the medical care rendered to the citizens in the participating countries. One can mention with pride that in response to Arab Board evaluations of some hospitals and in pursuit of recognition, marked re-organizations materialized in these hospitals. This re-organization entailed even building new hospitals or creating new sections. Increasing the qualified manpower whenever necessary was a regular occurrence.

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade the scientific councils of the Arab Board have made successful strides through a long struggle; have already graduated and certified over two hundred Arab physicians. Soon new councils will follow suit. However, without proper financial support the future of the currently existing councils may be at risk.

* The number has recently exceeded 2700

Projected number of certified graduates by 1990 may be 300 to 400.

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