

Impact of the Sudan conflict on medical education and training

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Dear Editor,

A war driven by a thirst for power has been draining Sudan since April 2023, destroying its infrastructure, resources, and landmarks. The monstrous war weapons and flying bullets ended nearly 15,000 lives and scared over 6.6 million civilians out of the safety of their homes and into the largest displacement crisis in the world.¹

The disruption of medical education has had significant consequences. Closure of medical schools and universities has interrupted academic schedules, delaying examinations and graduations, creating uncertainty and anxiety among students. Additionally, the lack of access to essential resources and facilities has hindered proper training for resident doctors and recent graduates. Practical experiences, crucial for medical education, have been particularly affected. Students are missing out on hands-on learning opportunities, vital for their professional development. These disruptions not only impact the immediate progress of current students but also have long-term implications for the medical field, potentially leading to a shortage of well-trained healthcare professionals in the future.

Sudan's healthcare system has been deteriorating since the beginning of the conflict in April 2023, with 68% of hospitals currently shuttered and others suffering from a lack of healthcare staff and equipment, and damage to medication stockpiles.² Most of Sudan's healthcare services are based in the capital Khartoum. Consequently, safe access to less than 20% of healthcare facilities is currently available as the capital was the first site to be attacked in the ongoing conflict.³ With time, the conflict zone widened, and the situation has become extremely difficult.

The Sudanese Medical Council held the last permanent registration exam, needed to obtain a license to practice medicine unsupervised, in April 2023.⁴ Therefore, thousands of recent graduate doctors who completed their internship program are faced with an uncertain fate, despite all efforts to overcome this.

The ongoing conflict contributes significantly to psychological unease among Sudanese people generally, and Sudanese medical students specifically. Medical students suffer the consequences of the upheaval of their academic journey and experience the unpredictability of its completion. Those able to currently gain an education constantly fear destabilization, and express concern regarding the quality of their education. Such circumstances induce high levels of anxiety and stress which may be difficult to manage. Other psychological effects of the war include depression and post-traumatic stress disorder due to exposure to graphic sites. Medical students may experience a sense of guilt, helplessness and self-pity as they lack the necessary resources, knowledge and experience to help those in need.

We propose immediate actions to safeguard educational institutions and support students during these challenging times in Sudan. We urgently appeal to local and international organizations to prioritize the safety of medical schools in the country. Swift measures are essential to prevent further attacks on medical schools. Given that 58.6% of medical faculties within conflict areas have been attacked,⁵ we recommend establishing supporting programs to adapting changes, and to facilitate the educational process. Online resources and collaborative initiatives are essential to sustain medical education during these challenging times. Together, we can ensure medical education continues to thrive—even in the face of adversity.

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