

Roles and Challenges of Family Physicians in Uganda: A Qualitative Study

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Background: The World Health report (2008) and the World Health Assembly resolution (2009) both acknowledge the significant roles of family physicians (FPs) in clinical and primary health care. Studies by Bob. M et al have documented the roles of African FPs. Given the contextual nature of family medicine, it is possible the actual roles of African family physicians are different in different African countries. This study aimed to explore the actual roles of Ugandan FPs and the challenges they face.

Methods: This cross-sectional qualitative study was conducted through in-depth interviews with FPs working in Uganda. Participants were working in public and private health care systems including non-governmental organizations and a variety of geographical settings. A total of 21 interviews were conducted between July 2016 to June 2017. Manual content thematic analysis of the transcripts was done.

Results: Three and six themes emerged about the roles and challenges of FPs respectively. Roles of FPs were: clinical, management and administration and teaching and learning. The themes identified as challenges faced by Ugandan family physicians included: low numbers, lack of clarity regarding their identity, role conflicts, inadequate organizational infrastructure and inadequate incentives.

Conclusion: The roles of FPs in Uganda are: providing clinical care, leadership, management and mentorship as well as teaching and learning. FPs in Uganda have found many places in the health system where they can contribute but have not found a stable home base. They still face challenges which include; lack of identity, role conflict, feelings of loneliness and isolation and haphazard placements within the health system.

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