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Introductory Course in Pediatric Oncology for Registrars/Residents and Medical Officers in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Pilot Study

A shortage of pediatric oncologists limits teaching and supervision of registrars/residents and medical officers working in pediatric oncology units, especially in low-, low-middle income countries. The global burden of childhood cancer is disproportionately high in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Our aim was to develop and pilot a blended, introductory course in pediatric oncology in the pediatric oncology centers in Zimbabwe and Zambia to support local teams in teaching trainees. The course comprised of self-paced online modules with a pre- and post-test, and live case-based discussions. The live sessions were led by international and local faculty. The course was designed to align with rotation times and could be completed in 6-12 weeks. The self-paced course was subsequently adopted in a center in South Africa. From May 2021 until August 2024, 25 learners completed the pre-test in the self-paced course; eight completed the post-test and had higher average post-test scores ($p = 0.0253$). Learners reported finding the content relevant, with knowledge gain noted by local pediatric oncologists during inpatient rounds as well. Future courses will include strategies to reduce learner attrition, which was a major challenge in the implementation and conduct of the course.

Keywords: blended learning, pediatric oncology education, general physicians, pediatricians, trainees, Sub-Saharan Africa

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Biography

I am a pediatric oncologist with an academic interest in trainee education and global workforce training. I am originally from Pakistan and have been in the USA since my postgraduate training in Pediatrics and Pediatric Hematology/Oncology (PHO). In my clinical role, I manage patients with hematologic malignancies. I am passionate about teaching and education; I oversee the training of residents at my institution, where I have focused on improvement of the learning environment and development of structured subspecialty education. At a global level, I am working on developing tiered courses to support capacity-building in pediatric oncology through evidence-based workforce training.