

Botswana's Doctor Assistant

Author Profile:

Shepherd Mothebe is a Doctor Assistant in Botswana. He has experience as a Clinical Preceptor and is an International spokesperson for the Botswana Clinical Officers Union (BCOU). Mothebe is currently studying Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) in Zambia.



General Information:

Botswana is a landlocked country in Southern Africa. Its borders are South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Botswana has a relatively small population with little over 2 million persons residing in the country. Despite the small population, there is still a shortage of doctors. Botswana healthcare workforce officials noted that several African, European, and North American countries had a mid-level cadre to take care of patients. In South Africa, this cadre is known as clinical associates and in Zimbabwe the cadre is known as clinical officers. Thus in 2015, the title of Doctor Assistant was chosen, and the Doctor Assistance course was introduced in Botswana. The Doctor's Assistance training program was set up in the medical school at DDT College of Medicine.

Entry Criteria:

Entry requirements into the program, include a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)/BGCSE/ O level with 40 points and above with strong sciences, Bachelor of Science (Bsc) year 1 entry or A levels. There is no specific pre-requisite degree or clinical experience required to enter the program.

Education:

DDT College of Medicine is the only school in the country offering the Doctor Assistance program.

The program is 4 years, and it is structured into 2 years of theory and 2 years of clinical rotations. The program runs on a trimester basis. During the 2 years of theory, students are fully engaged in the classroom and write tests approximately every 2 weeks with an end of term exam. They then sit for a comprehensive exit exam which comprises all material since the beginning of first year; students who pass this comprehensive exam proceed to clinical rotations. During clinical rotation each student rotates through multiple disciplines (e.g., Surgery, Medicine) for 3 months and then sit for an end of rotation exam. Clinical rotations also include practicals and lectures given by the onsite preceptor. The college has a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Health and students can go for their clinical rotations in government health facilities.

On average a Doctor Assistance class has 30 students. To date, 2 classes have graduated, the class of 2015 which graduated in September 2019 with about 26 graduates and the class 2016 which graduated in 2020 with 29 students. The class of 2015 graduated in September 2019 with 26 graduates and the class 2016 graduated in 2020 with 29 students. The students graduate with a Bachelor of Doctor Assistance degree: <http://www.ddtcollegeofmedicine.com>

Financing Education:

The government sponsors individuals upon attaining admission for the course. The sponsorship covers tuition fees, books, and living allowance. Private sponsorship is also available but typically for those students that do not qualify for the sponsorship from the government.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

The program is accredited by Botswana Qualifications Authority.
66450, Block 7 , Gaborone
(+267) 365 7200
customerservice@bqa.org.bw

The Botswana Qualifications Authority is a board that checks and ensures the quality of education and has approved the college to offer the Doctor Assistance course.

Botswana Qualifications Authority, the Ministry of health, and the Botswana Health Professions Council regulate the profession.

BOTSWANA HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL
Address: Plot no 725, Main Mall, 1st Floor Room 16- 23, Next to CENTRAL POLICE STATION
Gaborone, South-East, Botswana
Telephone: (+267) 3190749

Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOH)
Private Bag 0038
Address: Plot 54069, 24 Amos Street Government Enclave
Gaborone
Botswana
Toll-Free Customer: 0800600740
Enquiries: (+267) 3632500/3170585
Emergency Services: 997
Email: health@gov.bw

Professional Licensure:

There are currently no national board exams; however, students just before graduation take another comprehensive exam with theory and Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) to test their overall clinical knowledge. Failure to pass this exam a candidate cannot graduate.

The College offering the program is currently engaged with the Ministry of Health and the Health Professions Council to deal with issues of formal licensing and registration of the profession. At the current moment there is no searchable database of licensed professions as the profession is not currently licensed.

Maintaining License:

No formal arrangements are in place currently for continuing medical education/continuing professional development since the profession is not yet fully established.

Scope of Practice:

The scope of practice for a Doctor Assistant is mostly focused in working in primary health care, but many also practice in high acuity care centers in areas like accident and emergency (A&E), Obstetrics and gynecology, and assisting in surgery. The Doctor Assistant is capable of taking a history and performing a physical exam. They spend time formulating a diagnosis and management plan for the patient. The Doctor Assistant may see common family medicine conditions and prescribe independently. In complicated cases, the Doctor Assistant may refer to a Medical Officer. Analgesics, antibiotics, bronchodilators, eye drops, injections, anti-allergic medications, medications used in anaphylaxis, and refills for hypertension, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, are all medications that the Doctor Assistant may prescribe.

Job Opportunities:

The government is not currently hiring graduates due to the fact that the profession is not licensed. Private clinics do hire graduates; however, they do not pay the equivalent salary for the degree which is also related to the issues surrounding licensure. Doctor Assistants are needed especially by the government since there is shortage of health care workers in almost every district in the country. Considering the scope of practice, the Doctor Assistant could greatly relieve the health care burden.

References:

1. DDT College. Doctor Assistance. Accessed May 18, 2021.
<http://www.ddtcollegeofmedicine.com/bda.html>
2. World Bank. Botswana. Accessed May 18, 2021.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/botswana/overview>
3. Botswana Clinical Officers Union (BCOU). Electronic communications recorded history. Accessed May 2021.