

Rwanda, the Land of a Thousand Hills and Clinical Officers

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Nathan RUTATINA; BSc, MPH. is a registered Medical Clinical Officer. He is currently working as a Public Health Specialist with the Rwanda Ministry of Health in the division of Clinical and Public Health Services. He is also a consultant at Rwanda Joint Task Force on COVID-19 specifically in the divisions of Epidemiological Operations and Rapid Response Team. He is the founder and the current president of Rwanda Medical Clinical Officers Organization that brings together all Medical Clinical Officers in Rwanda and a member of Physician Assistant for Global Health.

Charles Nsanzabera

Charles is a researcher in global, public, and international health and development. He holds a bachelor's degree in clinical medicine and a master's degree in public health. He has hands-on Health-related Knowledge in managerial systems, health, and safety. In addition, he was most invested in health promotion, dealing with emergencies and clinical practices with tangible experience in occupation clinic leadership. Moreover, Charles has a versatile and tangible research-based philosophy in Occupational and community Cardiovascular Diseases Risk prediction, Factors, and its Practical scientific-based prevention that he is developing in his Public health Ph.D. thesis. He is also strong in coaching, team working, and engaging employees with target-oriented and data-driven health improvement. Furthermore, he is proactively oriented with agility in setting mitigation and contingency strategies for challenges that arise before, within, and after planning and roadmap initiation.



General Information:

Rwanda is a country in East Africa which is known as the Land of a Thousand Hills. In 2018, there was 1 doctor to provide care for approximately 9,000 people and reports from 2020 state the country's total population is over 12 million. The Clinical Officer profession was recognized to benefit the country and serve as part of the primary health care after a need's assessment in 2010. Clinical Officers are an important health profession; however, it has not been fully integrated in the Rwandan Health care system.

Entry Criteria:

To enter the program, you must hold a high school degree with at least a B average in the high school national exit examination that is prepared by the Rwanda Education Board. The above-mentioned grade average is a science GPA which may include any combination of Physics, Chemistry, Biology (PCB) or in MCB (Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology). There is no entrance exam required. There are no clinical requirements to enter the program.

Education:

The University of Rwanda is the only university that trains Clinical Officers. The program started in 2012 with a total of 39 students on a request of the Ministry of Health to the University of Rwanda to strengthen the primary health care system especially in rural areas of the country. The CO Clinical Medicine and Community Health program is within in the College of Medicine and Health Sciences School where the focus of this education brings in a team-based training and lecturers from various departments including general medicine. Presently the University has 82 students taking the course.

The School of Health Sciences at the University of Rwanda offers training for a period of 4 years. Each year focuses in on medical training and supervised internships in teaching hospitals that strengthen their didactic modules.

The training course ends with an exam, conducted at the teaching hospital itself, that assesses and evaluates the pre-graduate student for their clinical practice knowledge. The exam concentrates on Gynecology and Obstetrics, Internal Medicine, Surgery and Pediatrics. The evaluating team (Panel) is composed of a University delegate, a Hospital delegate holding at least a Masters' degree in Medicine (a specialist of the field being evaluated) and an external evaluator who works as a consultant evaluating Clinical Officers. It is this team that certifies that the pre-graduate can graduate as a Clinical Officer with a Bachelor's degree. The University of Rwanda has graduated 251 students since 2013.

Financing Education:

COs pay privately or through scholarship to attend the University of Rwanda Clinical Officer Program.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

There is no special accrediting body for the department of the Clinical Medicine and Community Health department at the University of Rwanda; however, the university itself is accredited by the Rwandan Higher Education with recognition from the Ministry of Education.

The profession is regulated by the Rwanda Allied Health Professions Council. It is on the other hand responsible for licensing clinical officers.

Professional Licensure:

There is no specific licensing exam other than what is required for graduation.

After completion of the CO 4-year training program, one immediately registers with the Rwanda Allied Health Professions Council. One is given a practicing license that can be renewed after 2 years. There is a searchable database of practicing Clinical Officers through the Rwandan Allied Health Professions Council. The Allied health Professions Council has a list of all practicing COs in the country.

Scope of Practice:

The scope of practice is focused on consultation, admission, discharge and rehabilitation of already discharged patients. All the mentioned can be conducted under a team-based practice with other health professions especially medical doctors and nurses. Community health is another area where COs are trained, here a Rwandan Clinical Officer is able to apply the theories of behavior change and other community-based health interventions. COs in Rwanda can prescribe medications.

Maintaining Role:

Rwandan Clinical Officers do not have to take a recertification exam. Continuing Medical Education/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Health related trainings, seminars, conferences and workshops are open to COs, where the licensee is required to earn 80 credits every 2 years (1credit=1hour). These trainings are conducted by the Rwanda Medical Clinical Officers' Organization in conjugation with Rwanda Allied Health Professions Council.

Job Opportunities:

The number of jobs available is based on fully integrating the profession of Clinical Officers into the Rwandan healthcare system which is still under process. There is a total of 44 Clinical Officers practicing as COs. Those COs working in the Public Health facilities are not practicing with a title of Clinical Officers. Others work in Non-Governmental Organizations and other private health facilities.

Rwanda has 131 graduate Clinical Officers from Burundi and Uganda. This brings a total of 382 Clinical Officers in Rwanda.

References:

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