

Zambia: The Medical Licentiates and the Clinical Officer Duo

Author Profile:

Musonda Joseph kamfwa, MPH, BSc, Dip.

+260975488322

Clinical Officers Association



Musonda Joseph Kamfwa is a Holder of Diploma Clinical medicine and surgery and has a B.Sc. in Public Health. He is also pursuing a master's in public health. He holds a Certificate in M&E, Certificate in HIV/AIDS and opportunistic management, data quality, HIV and communicable disease surveillance. Kamfwa's Professional Background includes: National publicity and coordinator of the Clinical Officer's association of Zambia (2018 to date); District Clinical and Programs manager (Technical), ICAP at Columbia University Zambia; former senior clinical officer, ministry of health Zambia and former Health professional's council of Zambia clinical officer's examiner under professional examinations.

General Information:

Clinical officers date back to 1950s. Training of advanced diploma candidates began in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A Degree in Clinical Officer training started in 2011, with many Clinical Officers graduating with a degree in clinical medicine, clinical ophthalmology, mental health and psychiatry, or clinical anesthesia etc. The names of profession in Zambia are Clinical Officer and Medical Licentiate.

There are several existing programs under the profession. These include the following:

- clinical officer ophthalmology
- clinical officer dermatovenerologist
- clinical officer psychiatrist
- clinical officer general
- medical licentiate practitioner
- clinical officer
- clinical officer ENT specialist
- clinical officer anesthetists
- anesthetic clinical officers
- clinical officer anesthesiologist (Bsc)

A Clinical Officer is a gazetted health practitioner (meaning Clinical Officers operate independently with minimal supervision or no supervision. By gazette, this health worker is by law obliged to provide health

services according to the level of training. They are registered to offer services under health professionals council act 24 of 2009 of the Laws of Zambia.

The Clinical Officer is a title given to someone who has studied Diploma in Clinical Medicine and Surgery, while a Medical Licentiate practitioner (ML) is a title given to someone who has studied a Degree in Clinical Medicine.

Entry Criteria:

Entry criteria include a high school certificate with 5 credits or better in pure physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, English and any other course as well as A-level sciences or a Cambridge certificate.

Additionally, entrants must have pre-medical sciences plus high school certificate for entry into the degree program for clinical medicine. Specifically, university entry into the degree program requires pre-medical training/A-levels or a diploma in clinical medicine or any other health science. A minimum of 50-100 students are enrolled in each class depending on certification of an institution capacity by the higher education authority and health professional's council of Zambia. (additional specific entry for each cadre listed below)

Education:

Zambia has 14 schools offering clinical medicine diplomas, and 3 offering a degree in clinical medicine. There are three separate degree programs; Bachelor of Clinical Medicine-Mental Health and psychiatry, Bachelor of Clinical Medical Sciences, Bachelor of Clinical Ophthalmology (only for those with a previous Diploma in Clinical Medicine).

For a person to qualify as Clinical Officer in addition to class work, they must have clinical experience of at least 10 months; (4 months should be covered in the 3 years period as part of learning, and 6 months rotation in all departments). On the other hand, a Medical Licentiate undergoes an intense training of 4 years and 1 year internship.

The Diploma in Clinical Medicine and Surgery is a 3-year course. The entry requirements to this program include full grade 12 school certificate or A-levels certificate or equivalent completed prior to entry.

The degree in clinical medicine is a 4-year course. The entry requirements include full grade 12 certificate or equivalent, 1-year A-level certificate, or college basic sciences training certificate. Direct entrants must possess a diploma in clinical medicine or equivalent with a minimum of 2 years of work experience.

The degree earned for Clinical Officers is a Bachelor's Degree in Clinical medicine, or, as above, a Diploma in Clinical Medicine. There is also a post-graduate diploma in emergency medicine.

Financing Education:

Financing of Clinical Officer training/education is largely private. Government and students themselves pay depending on the institution. The majority are paid by the students themselves.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

Regulation and accreditation are not identical. Regulation involves rules that must be followed, while accreditation is a seal of approval certifying that an organization or individual has met specific standards.

Programs are accredited with the higher education authority, through the University of Zambia and training is regulated by Health professions council of Zambia (HPCZ).

Clinical officers are recognized by the Ministry of Health of Zambia as critical providers for the country and are employed under the public service division as clinical officers with employment number MA (medical assistant).

Professional Licensure:

The official licensing body is the Health Professionals council of Zambia. Licensure examinations are also a mandate as prescribed by the health professions council from time to time. All exams prepared for clinical officers, irrespective of the school (private or government) are by the University of Zambia - School of Developmental Medicine' Examinations Council of Health Sciences.

The governing body/professional body is the Clinical Officers Association of Zambia. Currently there are approximately 5,520 ML and COs registered. Between 200 to 300 of this number are medical Licentiates.

There is not an establishment of a searchable database yet for ML/COs. However, details can be found on <https://www.hpcz.org.zm/>.

The process for getting a license after graduating is governed by an act of parliament; specifically the Health Professions act 24 of 2009. One is given a provisional license upon fulfilling all requirements under this, and after 1 to 2 years of clinical practice, if the institution of attachment of work approves that the practitioner is competent, then the council fully registers one as either ML or CO or specialist depending on level of education.

The Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Labour (MOL) all work together to support the profession.

Scope of Practice:

Clinical officers in Zambia are among the major drivers of primary health care and participate or rather handle a majority of, up to 80%, of all people who visit the health facility in Zambia.

Clinical officers' level of training are an integral part of internal medicine and a few surgical procedures. Clinical officer (CO) is a gazetted officer who is qualified and authorized to practice medicine. A Clinical Officer in Zambia observes, interviews and examines sick and healthy individuals in all specialties. COs document patient's health status, apply pathological, radiological, psychiatric and community health techniques, and perform procedures when necessary, to establish a provisional or

final diagnosis upon which to prescribe, initiate, carry out or terminate treatment or therapy. Patient management is based on specialized knowledge, skills and experience in clinical pharmacology, use of clinical guidelines, best practices and disease patterns as well as individual patient and community characteristics while actively preventing, identifying and managing drug reactions, drug errors, side effects and poisoning, overdiagnosis, over screening, overtreatment and futile care. A clinical officer in Zambia performs general and specialized medical duties such as diagnosing and treating disease and injury, ordering and interpreting medical tests, performing routine medical and surgical procedures, referring patients to other practitioners and managing health departments, institutions, projects and systems.

Unlike other countries, Clinical Officers form part of the district medical team and are employed as needed. They work as Senior managers, district HIV/TB focal persons, District Clinical care officers or clinical care specialists, District non conjunction disease focal persons, district lead clinical mentors. Clinical officers work in private practice and operate private clinics and NGOs. Both ML and CO prescribe. They practice as gazette practitioners, and in most facilities, they are the highest trained practitioners.

The majority of clinical officers in Zambia hospitals work in outpatient departments or inpatient departments offering medical and clinical services, maternity and labor wards, theatre and operating rooms where they perform surgeries. Medical licentiate practitioners or degree Clinical officers are trained to perform specialized procedures such as cesarean sections, laparoscopy, laparotomy, and surgical procedures as per level of training. Both MLs and COs prescribe medication.

Maintaining Role:

For annual license renewal a CPD is mandatory as governed by the act and prescribed in the CPD guidelines.

Job Opportunities:

Jobs are abundant - there is an establishment of 4,883 at ministry of health. We have the biggest establishment of any other medical profession at the ministry of health, with the exemption of nurses. All government and regulatory bodies work together to support the profession well in Zambia.

References:

1. <https://www.hpcz.org.zm/>