

Preface

A Note from the Editor- in- Chief: Severe Shortage of Surgeons

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For a relatively long period of time, Jordan has enjoyed a plethora of highly skilled and highly qualified surgeons and medical specialists in various disciplines. This was a combination of investment in training by the royal medical services, the newly established medical schools and the individuals who drive to excel in the areas they enjoy most. In addition, there were plenty of opportunities for the training of good doctors in Western Europe, especially in UK, USA, Canada and Australia. The individual surgeon (or physician) would master the state of the art in his field and would transfer and apply this in Jordan.

After the major crash of the Jordanian economy in the late eighties, all public institutions were short of funds and they had to cut off their budgets of sponsoring training abroad. The sudden loss of 50% of the value of the Jordanian Dinar, made it very difficult for a person to support himself abroad while being trained in clinical postgraduate medicine. As a consequence, fewer doctors went for training abroad; with the exception of some local graduates who found new opportunities in USA, mostly in non-surgery areas. Unfortunately, most of these graduates have settled for good in USA.

For those who chose to come back, the majority went to GCC countries or private sector. This has led to shrinkage in the pool of clinical teachers and, subsequently, to less than adequate local training and deprivation of trainees from the up-to-date surgical techniques and methods.

The September 11th and subsequent events along with other factors have dried up opportunities for the training of our surgeons in Western Europe and USA. All that has led to severe drop in the number of trained young surgeons coming to stay. To make things worse, many of the best surgeons are either retired or about to retire.

I can foresee that within the coming five to seven years most of the pool of smart surgeons which has existed in the last 30 years will dry up. Let me take neurosurgery as an example: 20 years ago, when the population was 2.6 millions, there were at least 11 highly qualified senior neurosurgeons. That is a ratio of 4.2 surgeons per 1 million persons. Today, for the reasons mentioned above and the population growth, that ratio has dropped to 1.5 surgeons per 1million persons.

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The picture is almost as bleak concerning other surgical specialties. Nowadays, one needs to look really hard to find a good "functional" ear surgeon for a moderately complex surgery and may find only 1 or 2 who can perform a very complex surgery. Almost the same thing applies to other surgical subspecialties.

The situation, in my opinion is desperate and needs very urgent attention from all the planners and leaders in the health field. The road to a highly qualified and skilled surgeon is a very long and arduous one. It takes a minimum of 8 to 10 years after graduation to train a skilled surgeon in a particular subspecialty.

I do not see many on the right road to that end today. I predict that we will be importing surgeons in subspecialty areas from other countries within the coming 7 years. I predict that we will be dependent on them for a minimum of 15 more years.

The cost of importing a surgeon is astronomical. While public institutions may still employ a neurosurgeon for as little as JD 5000 a month (including benefits), it will cost at least 5 times that much to hire a similarly qualified neurosurgeon from abroad. I call upon the government to take immediate corrective measures or else things will be left too late and will take the worse scenario course.