



CAN MEDICAL DIPLOMACY MITIGATE SURGICAL DISPARITY IN POST-CONFLICT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVA’S EXAMPLE*

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Introduction:

The healthcare system in the Republic of Kosova (RKS) was severely damaged during the 1998/1999 war and has been neglected for over two decades since then.

This has led to a large portion of the country's limited budget being spent on treatment abroad, showcasing a new form of medical neocolonialism.

This paper aims to explore the use of medical diplomacy (MD) and the establishment of clinical centers of excellence (CCE) as strategies to address medical and surgical disparities and combat neocolonialism in RKS.

Methods:

Analyses of healthcare system was performed during December 1, 2021 - September 31, 2022, and data from the State’s Insurance Fund of Kosova of treatment abroad for period 2019 - August 2022 were reviewed.

Results:

- The following issues were identified:
- 1) the RKS has the lowest GDP budget in the Balkans and amongst the lowest in the world;
 - 2) up to 40% of population have catastrophic expenses for treatment abroad;
 - 3) the lack of clinical expertise and inadequate hospital infrastructure; and
 - 4) corruption imbedded in all chains of public healthcare system.
- A multi-prong transformation strategy using primarily medical diplomacy was created involving:
- a) modernizing the hospital infrastructure with the support of donors;
 - b) establishing 12 advanced clinical centers of excellence, of which 9 are surgery related; (ACCOE) and
 - c) 14 new advance clinical surgical fellowships (ACF).

Conclusion:

We consider that establishing medical diplomacy, ACCOE, ACF, and improving hospital infrastructure can reduce long-term healthcare disparity in post-conflict countries by increasing surgical abilities and expertise.
This in turn will reduce very costly treatment abroad, a new form of medical neocolonialism in post conflict countries.

STRATEGY FOR MITIGATING SURGICAL DISPARITY AND MECICAL NEOCOLONIALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVA

PROPOSED CENTERS AND SURGICAL CLINICAL PROGRAMS OF EXCELLENCE

- 1. The Trauma, Emergency, and Burn Center;
- 2. Clinical Oncology Center of Kosovo (COCK) with ten departments and eleven clinical programs;
- 3. Bio Medical and Scientific Research Institute with four departments: a) Scientific Research; b) Medical Simulation, and Technological Education; c) Minimally Laparoscopic Surgery Laboratory, and d) Clinical Guidelines and Protocols;
- 4. Regional Center for Training and Emergency Disaster and Trauma Management
- 5. Consolidation of the Center for Neurosciences
- 6. Consolidation of the Heart Center
- 7. Minimally Invasive Laparoscopic Surgery Program in General Surgery, Urology, Gynecology, Pediatrics, and Thoracic Surgery
- 8. Endovascular Surgery Program
- 9. Kidney and tissue transplant program

ADVANCED SURGICAL CLINICAL FELLOWSHIPS

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* During the period of November 2021 to October 2022, the author, a trauma and general surgeon in the USA, originally from Kosova, served as the Minister of Health of Kosova.