

Educational Resources for Global Health in Otolaryngology

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KEYWORDS

• Education • Resources • Global health • Otolaryngology

KEY POINTS

- As global health initiatives continue to grow, so will the need for quality educational materials and programming.
- eLearning and open education resources are expanding the global communities' access to educational opportunities and experiences.
- The evolution of online resources and the development of telecommunications have allowed aid organizations to incorporate telemedicine into their efforts to expand the care they provide for underserved regions.

OBJECTIVES

The first aim of this article is to serve as an overview of the current state of global education, including suggestions for easily accessible programs and opportunities for local health care providers in limited resource areas. A secondary aim is to provide a summary of key resources for those interested in participating in an otolaryngology surgical mission.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid advances in information and computer technology have equipped today's educators with powerful and innovative methods of disseminating knowledge. World Wide Web-based and mobile learning platforms coupled with open access resources have become increasingly used methods of education delivery. In the global health domain, the diversity of these modalities and approaches transcend national boundaries and allows for a higher standard of care than was previously available.

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In addition, this globalization of education allows for the transfer of medical knowledge from specialists to physicians who work in more rural or remote locales. This article highlights the innovative approaches that have fostered improved collaboration and coordination of global health efforts in otolaryngology.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND LOW-RESOURCE SETTINGS

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the highest proportion of the global burden of disease falls on regions that also suffer from physician shortages. This is especially true of subspecialty surgery, which is all but absent in some developing nations.¹ Major contributors to higher disease incidences include environmental factors, nutritional deficiencies, limited public health measures, and behavioral risk factors. Examples of increased otolaryngology disease burden include chronic otitis media, oral and oropharyngeal cancer, and thyroid disease.² The WHO estimates that chronic otitis media is a major contributor to acquired hearing loss in developing countries, with 65 to 330 million people suffering worldwide. The developing world accounts for 90% of the world's 278 million people with bilateral conductive hearing loss, yet only 1 in 40 people who would benefit from hearing aids has one.³ The developing world also harbors most patients with cancer. Two-thirds of the worldwide burden of oral and oropharyngeal cancer is in developing nations. Higher cancer rates and poorer outcomes are correlated with more disadvantaged populations. Iodine deficiency resulting in thyroid goiter is estimated to affect nearly 10% of the world's population, contributing to the high global burden of surgical thyroid disease.²

With an increasing otolaryngologic disease burden and an insufficient number of trained specialists worldwide, otolaryngologists have a critical role in the development of public health programs, allied health services, and educational programs for the medical and surgical management of head and neck diseases. In addition, residency training programs have created opportunities for residents to work internationally. In one recent survey, 25% of US otolaryngology residency programs were found to participate in global health volunteer projects.⁴ For these reasons, it is important to inform and educate future surgeons how to incorporate outreach otolaryngology care into their careers and to provide an overview of free educational resources that can serve to augment global otolaryngology health through education in low-resource countries.

GLOBAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

There are several ways the global community can provide otolaryngology services, especially as it relates to surgical education. One avenue is through participation in a short-term medical/surgical mission trip or global health initiative, generally organized by nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and faith-based or charitable groups.^{5,6} A list of organizations involved in humanitarian endeavors (otolaryngology-related or affiliated national society Web sites) and a select list of the most relevant humanitarian opportunities are detailed in [Table 1](#). More recently, numerous organizations and institutions have begun partnering with low-resource countries to form collaborative training programs and research partnerships. These partnerships can improve access and quality of care, decrease the disparities in access to surgical care, and strengthen health systems.⁷ The sustainability of any humanitarian program or collaborative partnership depends on more than just the provision of surgical services. Education is an essential aspect to successful global health initiatives, whether improving the ability of the global workforce to meet the needs of underserved populations or supporting those participating in humanitarian medical care.

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