New collaborative programme launched to increase access to anaesthesia care for surgical patients in East, Central and Southern Africa

7th February 2020: A new multi-national anaesthesia partnership programme for East, Central and Southern Africa has been launched today. This programme is funded by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and aims to provide access to safer and more affordable anaesthesia care for those in need of surgery in the region.

Developed as a collaboration between the College of Anaesthesiologists of East, Central and Southern Africa (CANECSA), the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA), the Institute of Global Surgery in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), and the College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland (CAI), the programme aims to build the capacity of CANECSA to address the most significant barrier to safe surgery in the region.

Announcing the programme, CANECSA President Dr Mpoki Ulisubisya said “There can be no safe surgery without safe anaesthesia, yet the number of professionals in this field is very low compared to the region’s population and its burden of disease. CANECSA aims to advance education, standards, and research in Safe Anaesthesia and Critical Care for the people of East, Central and Southern Africa to significantly scale up anaesthesia service in the region. The unique collaboration of four Irish and African training Colleges will support CANECSA to work towards health equality for all who are affected by current surgical conditions or require surgical and anaesthesia care in the region.”

Existing training models in place are not producing the necessary number of anaesthesiologists required to provide safe anaesthesia care. At present, the shortage is aggravated by the low number of trainers, a lack of formal training for trainers, the cost of training, and the lack of professional prestige associated with their training. Collegiate training through CANECSA has been identified as an important solution to the lack of anaesthesiologists in the region.

Beginning in 2020, CANECSA, COSECSA, CAI and RCSI will work together to establish training sites in the region, develop suitable curricula and hold internationally benchmarked anaesthesia Fellowship exams.

The programme builds on the well-established RCSI and COSECSA Collaboration Programme, and funding has been provided by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the period of December 2019 to November 2020. Through a range of joint
initiatives such as this, RCSI and COSECSA are working to improve access to safe, affordable and more timely surgical care.

RCSI President Mr Kenneth Mealy said “We welcome the launch of this multi-national training programme in partnership with CANECSA, COSECSA, and CAI. The introduction of a programme such as this is a significant step towards the provision of safe and affordable anaesthesia services in the region. At RCSI, we are proud to be able to share our resources and expertise, working with partner organisations to deliver much needed programmes like this, with the ultimate goal of achieving health equity for all.”

Dr Brian Kinirions, President of the College of Anaesthesiologists of Ireland said: “ We are committed to harnessing the support of our global network of Fellows to deliver initiatives in low and middle income countries in line with the Lancet commission findings and UN Sustainable Development Goals to improve access to safer Anaesthesia and safer surgery. We welcome this partnership with RCSI, CANESCA & COSECSA to increase patient safety for all.”

COSECSA Secretary General Prof Eric Borgstein noted that “by 2020 the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA) will have achieved its goal of training 500 surgeons in the region. This could not have been achieved without the help of RCSI and the support from Irish aid. Many more surgeons are needed in a region with the lowest ratio of surgeons per head of population in the world. However it has become clear to all in COSECSA that one of the biggest limiting factors to the expansion of surgery in Africa is the shortage of medically trained anaesthesiologists. COSECSA is happy to collaborate and make its 20 year experience of examination and training available to support the growth of its sister college CANECSA.”

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