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The American Thoracic Society Global Scholars Program

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The American Thoracic Society (ATS) has started the Global Scholars Program in June of 2015 (1). The program was a presidential initiative of Atul Malhotra, who was ATS president from 2015–2016 (2–4). The program consists of a series of webinar-based lectures in which students in developing countries participate via internet. The program began in Mozambique and Uganda, but now involves 11 different countries and over 170 students in developing countries around the world. Each site has a local champion who helps to facilitate participation and to organize the students at the various sites. The 25 lectures cover a curriculum in respiratory medicine with each student completing a pre- and post-test. The lectures are interactive, allowing live questions from participants, but also the videos are archived to facilitate participation among students who may have issues with time zones, electricity, or internet connectivity. Upon successful completion of the program, the students receive a certificate designating them as Global Scholars of the ATS (5,6). The top students are awarded a free trip to the ATS International Conference in the US. In May of 2016, three students attended the ATS meeting in San Francisco, including Susan Akello, Daniel Muyanga, and Irina Mbanze. Although the program is still in its infancy, we already have data showing statistically significant improvements in knowledge comparing post-test results to the same students on pre-test (see *Figure 1*). The following is the feedback that we received from Irina, one of the ATS Global Scholars, who traveled from Maputo, Mozambique to San Francisco as a leading student in this program.

What is ATS Global Scholars?

The Global Scholars Program was created in 2015 to

improve the knowledge of physicians in developing countries about pulmonary diseases.

How helpful were the lectures?

I have to say that the faculties were excellent. In one hour they were able to summarize the basic concepts and objectives for each lesson and at the same time they give us the wide range of clinical presentations of the diseases. They taught us the standard ways of diagnosis and treatment.

But the best thing was the fact that we could ask questions in a chat box and interact. Actually the discussions were very good because there are different capacities in each country and we were able to see what was the best option in our reality.

Many aspects highlighted allow us to improve our daily practice and I hope that with the improvement in the next years we could use better the learning.

As a student of this program I was able to attend the ATS Conference in 2016 and learn from the best in pulmonary diseases, critical care and sleep medicine, something that is not easy to happen in a country like mine.

Who attends the program?

Every resident and fellow interested in lung diseases. But all general practitioners and residents in internal medicine working in the hospital should attend in my humble opinion. I have to confess, as a cardiac fellow my passion is cardiac disease. But I thought that I should attend the lessons because in many ways the lung diseases are related with cardiac diseases. Because I am a physician in a developing country I usually work at the emergency

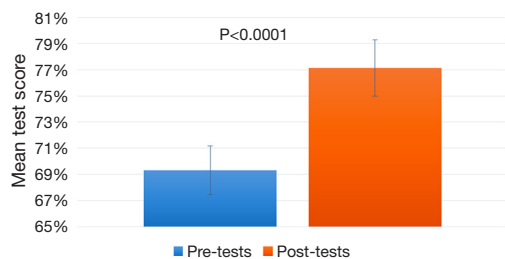


Figure 1 Mean score of Global Scholars Students in year 1 of program (pre-test vs. post-test performance).

department as general practitioner and I must treat correctly the patients who frequently present with lung diseases.

What's are the limitations of the ATS Global Scholars Program?

Access to internet, sometimes we have problems.

Different schedules of the GPs, residents and fellows.

For some colleagues of mine the language is a limitation, because our mother language is Portuguese.

Challenges for the future

Increase the number of the countries attending the lectures.

In my city (Maputo), I think we should contact more physicians, in other hospitals. In my city we have two general hospitals and there are people who could be interested in attending. Improve the internet connection.

In a short period discuss some interesting cases of our reality which many times are different of the cases in USA.

In summary, the ATS Global Scholars Program is now well underway with a bright future ahead. In theory, the participants in the program will hopefully gain knowledge over time such that eventually they may be able to teach students locally various aspects of respiratory medicine (7-9). Thus, the vision for the program is to build local capacity such that ultimately a self-sustaining model could emerge (10). We have received excellent feedback thus far and we are optimistic that this program will ultimately have a major impact.

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Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: Dr. Malhotra is PI on NIH RO1 HL085188,

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