

FIDE Turns Global Dermatology Into a Reality

BY BETSY BATES

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

A living embodiment of that sentiment, the Foundation for International Dermatologic Education (FIDE), has been quietly lending a hand to colleagues

in developing countries while fostering a rich exchange of dermatologic ideas across borders for 37 years.

A nonprofit organization, FIDE was founded in 1972 by 10 dermatologists from various countries (including 5 from the United States: Dr. Harvey Blank, Dr. Coleman Jacobson, Dr. Eugene Farber, Dr. Morris Samitz, and Dr. Orlando Cañizares (the principal founder and first director general).

In the 1970s, the group attempted to set up a dermatologic training and research center in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, but was thwarted by political upheaval. The next attempt, a dermatologic clinic at Kamuzu Central Hospital in Malawi, soon became a reality as the only dermatologic teaching center in Southeastern Africa at the time.

From those humble roots, FIDE has greatly expanded both its mission and its

membership, and today is at the forefront of a renaissance of global dermatology, both because of expanded technological outreach and the pressing medical needs that come with globalization, said Dr. Sigfrid A. Muller, president of FIDE for the past 10 years and an ardent supporter of international dermatology.

"I've been interested always in international cooperative studies and interchange," said Dr. Muller, recalling early efforts to unite dermatologists through both FIDE and the International Society of Dermatology, an organization with many shared members and ideals.

Through the years, Dr. Muller, retired chair of dermatology at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., encountered both apathy and resistance to the notion of bridging cultural differences while assisting developing countries with basic training and clinical dermatologic needs.

A growing band of believers held to the task, however, and international dermatology organizations have flourished. Global dermatology has been embraced as a priority by every major dermatologic organization.

"The science of dermatology has improved tremendously worldwide," he said in an interview in Las Vegas, where he has practiced since his retirement from Mayo in 1995.

Early FIDE efforts, assisted by the International Foundation for Dermatology and the Tanzanian government, established the Regional Dermatology Training Centre in that country, which, under the direction of Dr. Henning Grossman, has trained 63 local non-MD dermatology officers in the diagnosis and treatment of skin diseases.

Further cooperation between FIDE and the Noah Worcester Dermatological Society has extended training to dermatologists; 16 Tanzanian community dermatologists and a Kenyan candidate were trained from 2001 to 2008.

These dermatologists now practice throughout rural Tanzania, profoundly improving the level of care throughout the country, said Dr. Muller.

In addition, FIDE (www.fide-derm.org) works with the American Academy of Dermatology's Committee on International Affairs to sponsor young dermatologists worldwide to travel to the annual meeting of the AAD.

Candidates are selected—often by major departments of dermatology or societies in their native countries—on the basis of youth, leadership qualities, clinical skills, investigative and research abilities, and acumen in political outreach, said Dr. Muller.

In some cases, grants are underwritten by pharmaceutical companies such as Galderma, Neutrogena, and Stiefel. Other physicians are sponsored by dermatologists. "We can spend small amounts of money and take someone who's struggling and say to them, 'We believe in you. We're going to give you a scholarship to come to the academy. We believe you will make a difference in your country,'" said Dr. Muller. ■

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