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FACULTY RECRUITMENT FOR A PORTUGUESE-LANGUAGE OPTOMETRY PROGRAM: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF THE MOZAMBIQUE EYE CARE PROJECT

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Introduction

The Mozambique Eyecare Project (MEP) was launched in February 2009 at Universidade Lúrio in Nampula, Mozambique.

This unique institutional collaboration is a programme for the development of a regional optometry training model for Portuguese-speaking Africa. With no professional optometrists locally or regionally, faculty had to be recruited from outside the continent. Nine faculty recruited to date to deliver the undergraduate academic programme include optometrists from:

• Spain
• Portugal
• Colombia.

This paper will present data related to the challenges and experiences of recruiting expatriate optometric faculty for this first Portuguese-language undergraduate optometry program for Africa.

Materials and methods

• Semi-structured interviews conducted with five expatriate faculty who worked on the Project between May 2010 and October 2011
• Project reports and observations to elicit qualitative information on faculty recruitment challenges and experiences, as well as general faculty experiences and challenges in the project
• Data from all nine faculty recruits analysed for common themes

Discussion and Conclusions

• Optometry still a developing profession in most Portuguese-speaking countries, with varying scope of practice challenges; therefore difficult to attract suitably qualified and experienced Portuguese-language optometrists who are available for long-term contributions to such culturally and professionally-challenging assignments.
• Linguistic variations between Portuguese and Spanish pose some challenges to accurately delivering required academic content.
• Faculty noted personal satisfaction and sense of contribution to greater development agenda for Mozambique, despite logistical, cultural, as well as professional challenges and sacrifices.
• Those who had never worked in academia or development before also acquired a new skills set they could carry into their future careers.