

*Information and photo courtesy of Brad Volk, M.D., LCDR MC USN stationed at Camp Eggers, Kabul, Afghanistan. Dr. Volk is the point of contact for Books without Borders donations to Kabul Medical University.*



Kabul Medical University (KMU), Afghanistan's top medical school, was established in 1932 and had six students in its first graduating class. Founding faculty members were recruited from Turkey, although subsequent instructors over the next several decades came from France and other countries. Throughout the next several decades, qualified Afghans who studied abroad returned to teach. More recently under Taliban law, KMU continued to train physicians, although women were not permitted to enroll. With the election of President Hamid Karzai medical schools such as KMU faced the considerable challenge of rebuilding their facilities while educating their students.

Nonetheless, KMU Chancellor Professor Dr. Obaidullah and his colleagues remain committed to improving the quality of their students' education. The university has approximately 2,400 students enrolled in its four divisions: Curative Medicine, Pediatrics, Stomatology (Dentistry), and Nursing. Currently between 30 and 40 percent of its student population is women. The recent arrival of a Navy Medical Embedded Training Team (ETT) provided an unusual opportunity for U.S.-trained physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals to make a lasting impact on the next generation of Afghanistan's physicians. ETT members are working to develop lectures with related clinical skills for KMU students and currently teach resident and staff physicians working at the National Military Hospital in Kabul.

KMU is offering their first year med students extensive ESL courses so that they can speak English. They are trying to fill their libraries with English textbooks to encourage this. Speaking to the 6th and 7th year students, many use English textbooks quite frequently. The languages in Afghanistan are predominantly Pashtu and Dari. The administrators recognize that there are no medical textbooks in these languages, and are pursuing the English references. Teaching is only one part of KMU's long-term reconstruction efforts. The medical library has been neglected for many years and now has a critical need for up-to-date textbooks.

In 2004 Duke University in conjunction with the Manitoba Medical Student's Association (MMSA) donated 1700 medical textbooks the Medical Science Faculty Library at the University of Kabul. Nevertheless, many of these books were from the mid-1990's or earlier and are now outdated to current clinical practices. Furthermore, access to electronic publications and other resources is extremely limited because of ongoing electricity shortages. The most cost-effective investment in the university's information system would be to provide up-to-date medical reference texts in quantities that would be readily available for students and staff.