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There is a marked shortage of surgical manpower all over Africa. General surgeons undertake a very wide range of surgical work because of the lack of specialists. Orthopaedic and general surgeons both care for accident injuries. Current training and recruitment programs are inadequate in correcting existing gross manpower deficiencies. The situation is further aggravated by a gross maldistribution of available manpower in favor of large urban centers. In many parts of rural Africa, minor surgical procedures are carried out by suitably trained, non-physician health workers, but facilities and resources for surgery outside urban centers are generally inadequate. The World Health Organization program on essential surgical and anesthetic procedures, which is currently under way in collaboration with the International Federation of Surgical Colleges, the World Federation of Societies of Anesthesiologists, and other professional bodies, should have a significant impact on these urgent needs for basic surgery in rural district hospitals.