

49TH ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE (AGC)
OF THE GHANA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (GMA)
HELD IN TAKORADI ON NOV 05-11, 2007

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT, DR. FRANCIS ADU-
ABABIO**

SALUTATION

Hon. Minister of Health, Major. Courage Quashigah (rtd)
Hon. Regional Minister, Western Region
Metropolitan Chief Executive, SAEM, Shama Ahanta East Metropolis
Omanhene of Essikado Traditional Area, Nana Kobina Nketsiah VI
Past GMA Presidents
Fellows and Members of the GMA
Distinguished invited guests
Ladies and gentlemen
The Press

I am privileged but humbled to address this august gathering. I realise that as the GMA President, I follow a line of extremely eminent Presidents of our noble Association to speak on a platform to a captive audience including the representative of H.E. the President of the Republic of Ghana, Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor in the person of Major Courage Quashigah (rtd) who is also the Minister of Health.

I also wish to extend a warm welcome to the Minister of Health, Major Courage Quashigah (rtd), Ministers of State, Members of Parliament, Nana Kobina Nketsiah VI, Omanhene of Essikado Traditional Area our very Special Guest and Members of the Diplomatic Corps as well as the Representatives of the Health Sector Development Partners who are here.

On behalf of the National Executive Council (NEC) and the entire GMA membership, I extend a hearty welcome to all Fellows of the GMA; to the several distinguished personalities who accepted the invitation to be amongst us on this occasion. I say AKWAABA to you all.

Permit me to turn to something less somber but nevertheless praiseworthy. This conference is being held by the Western Division in Takoradi which incidentally will serve as one of the venues for the 26th Edition of the African Cup of Nations football tournament to be hosted by Ghana in 2008. The euphoria preceding CAN 2008 in the twin city of Sekondi-Takoradi did not prevent our colleagues in this region from accepting to host us. I therefore wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Chairman and members of the Planning committee for working tirelessly to add this conference to the highly successful one you organized in 2000 ie7 years ago. Well done for serving the GMA.

Representative of H. E. the President of the Republic of Ghana, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme for the 49th AGC is “Medical Ethics and Safety of Medical Practice in Ghana: Emerging Challenges”. Firstly, let me dwell on medical ethics. These are moral values, standards and principles determined by peers in the medical/dental profession which govern our practice throughout life. To the astute layperson, the Hippocratic Oath/Physician’s Pledge summarizes the ‘dos and don’ts’ of our profession hence any action either overtly or covertly committed by a practitioner which is at variance with the Physician’s Oath is considered unethical in the profession. The service we provide is under severe public scrutiny and criticism. Recently, health professionals in Ghana have been bombarded by claims that the quality of care offered in our health facilities is so inexcusably low to the extent that some of the clients are beginning to have second thoughts about the practice of Orthodox Medicine in Ghana. Simply put, our public image is not worthy of praise. Indeed as the GMA President, on a daily basis, I am confronted with the problem of how to restore the sinking image of our noble profession which was in the past associated with dignity and respect. The awkward questions so often asked are – what type of training do we give to trainees in health institutions? What is the calibre of new entrants into these training Schools, Colleges and Universities?

Representative of H. E. the President of the Republic of Ghana, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, these two questions I have posed are among the several that threaten safe medical practice in our dear country. As one philosopher said, “the problems and their solutions lie with us and not in our stars”. It is in recognition of the enormous emerging challenges facing the health sector that the Association continues to lead initiatives that are aimed at improving health indicators for Ghana. We shall continue to pursue laudable programmes in partnership with all stakeholders both in the public and private sectors because the Association is fully convinced that the wealth of the nation is largely dependent on the health of the people.

I urge all health training institutions in Ghana to strengthen the teaching of medical ethics. In the medical/dental schools, the ethos of the profession must be an examinable subject. Above all, senior colleagues of the profession should impart ethical practices to the young ones. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to express my concerns and indeed that of the association on 3 key areas that are more likely to negate the gains we have made in our developmental agenda.

NHIS

Let me once again say that the NHIS is a commendable way of making health care available to the broad masses of our people. Admittedly, the NHIS removes the financial barriers. However, the system is fraught with too many implementation challenges. Not only do we have an unfriendly registration process but also chronic delays in receiving identification cards. There are also reports of the scheme owing billions of old Ghana cedis meant for health facilities who have submitted their genuine claims. I sincerely hold the view that the mechanism of payment to service providers must be streamlined to remove unnecessary bottlenecks. If we continue this way to cripple the health institutions, I am afraid the NHIS will soon collapse the health institutions. Ultimately, it is the poor client who bears the brunt of somebody’s administrative inefficiency. Let me reiterate that the NHIS should purge itself of all fraudsters who are determined to sponge the scheme through their nefarious activities. To this end, I plead with the NHIC not to shield any such perpetrators.

MEDICAL & DENTAL COUNCIL (MDC)/ 2-YEAR - HOUSEMANSHIP TRAINING

In my address to you a year ago, I suggested to the MDC that it has become imperative to hold a stakeholders meeting to critically evaluate the 2-year housemanship programme instituted 3 years ago. I wish to place on record that within the year under review, the MDC has organized 2 highly successful round table discussions to resolve the challenges militating against the smooth running of the 2 year-housemanship training. It is my fervent hope that the recommendations arising from the meeting shall be forwarded to the Ministry of Health without delay. It is my conviction that the implementation of the new policy on housemanship training shall commence in 2008. In the years ahead, it is also my expectation that the GMA will deepen its cooperation and resolve to work closely with the MDC to raise the level of health care in Ghana.

GHANA COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS (GCPS)

Representative of H. E. the President of the Republic of Ghana, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the GMA can pride itself on having played a pivotal role in the establishment of the GCPS. We are indeed glad that the College is thriving very well and is about to celebrate the 4th birthday later this month. We wish the GCPS more healthy celebrations. We also applaud all who stood steadfastly behind the association in our quest to make this College a reality.

World-wide, postgraduate studies have become a reliable means of building human capital to address local problems. One area where I see inequity in health is the skewed distribution of Specialists in this country. It is most unfair to see our highly skilled health professionals particularly doctors concentrated in the 2 major cities of Accra and Kumasi.

This is unacceptable. The training of Specialists under the Ghana College should be as envisaged at its foundation, designed to make the regional and district hospitals fully benefit from the expertise of products from the College. I suggest a 1- year mandatory regional/district posting for trainees who have passed the part – 2 membership examinations. This measure, if well planned and executed, is more likely to decongest the Teaching Hospitals. On entry requirements to the college, the newly introduced method of recruiting trainees through the award of point system deserve commendation and must be supported by interest parties.

NEW MEDICAL/DENTAL SCHOOLS

As a developing nation, the need for more doctors is obvious. However, the thirst for more doctors/dentists should not override quality products which are derived from institutions with well resourced facilities. With this in view, I am therefore astonished that despite the persistent calls on government to improve infrastructural facilities at the Tamale Hospital to merit the training of doctors, nothing seems to be happening.

Let me use this platform to appeal to H.E. the President to commit the remaining 14 months of his tenure to turn around the fortunes of the Tamale Hospital and the UDS Medical School.

It is also gratifying to see the University of Cape Coast and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi starting medical and dental programmes respectively. I say well done. Again church-led medical schools are beginning to emerge in Ghana. These are positive initiatives. Together, let us have a developmental agenda on health manpower with agreed bench marks within which to operate. Mushrooming of medical schools in Ghana without proper control is a recipe for mediocrity in this great profession. Let us bail the water now that it is ankle deep.

ANNUAL REPORT

Special Guest of Honour, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to present some highlights of the association's activities during my 2-year tenure of office.

HEALTH SECTOR SALARY STRUCTURE (HSSS)

The GMA continued to discuss with their employers- MOH/GHS the salaries of public sector practitioners. With the abolition of ADHA in 2006, a new HSSS is in place for public sector health professionals. It is an understatement to mention that there are implementation difficulties with the new pay structure. In addition, the Terms of Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) governing salary negotiations held over a year ago with the employer has not been signed mainly as a result of the employer's lack of forthrightness on the doctors working hours and the implications of the newly implemented salary structure against all warnings from the GMA. Controversies surrounding workers salaries particularly in the health sector often degenerate into industrial actions.

It is regrettable that workers agitations over salaries often receive knee-jerk responses from government. This practice must be aborted. To quote what one senior colleague said 'employers should always try not to create situations which may cause the strike idea to enter the minds of doctors'. End of quote. It is hoped that the inauguration of the much-awaited Fair Wages Commission/Pay Administration Institution could be expedited to avoid industrial turbulence that have characterized the health sector in the recent past.

REFURBISHED OLD GMA HOUSE (ANNEX)

The old GMA house has been refurbished into offices and has now become the Annex of the GMA House. The cost of the entire project was borne by the association. Currently, the following groups and societies who applied for office space had their requests approved by the NEC.

- The GMA Pension Fund
- Society of Private Medical & Dental Practitioners
- Ghana Dental Association
- Quasi-Government Health Institutions (SIC, Trust Hospital, Cocoa Clinic etc)

GMA ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURE

The 8th GMA Annual Public Lecture was held at the Osu Ebenezer Presbyterian Church Hall in August 2007. The theme was '**Home Environment and Health**'.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

The association organized 2 CPD in each of the Northern and Southern Sectors of the country. The first symposium, held on June 08, 07 was on the theme, '**Upholding the practitioner – protecting the public – the law in Medical and Dental Practice (NRCD 91)**'. We thank the MDC for providing financial support. On September 07, 2007, the Ghana Aids Commission collaborated with the GMA to host the second continuing medical education programme on the theme, '**Overview of HIV/AIDS situation in Ghana**'.

GOMOA FETTEH LAND- MR. KOFI ASMAH

Happy to announce that the controversies surrounding the Gomoa Fetteh land are over. GMA members who bought the said land could now make entry.

GMA ‘FRAFRAHA’ LAND/SANDPLEX COURT CASE

An Accra Fast Track Court is yet to rule on the land dispute between the GMA and Mr. Darfour/Sandplex Company Ltd.

I suggest a second look at the Land Administration in the Country.

On this issue the GMA has been a victim of the inefficiencies in the land administration in Ghana.

GMA @ 50 – 2008

On 4th January, 2008, the GMA will be 50 years. Launching of the GMA @ 50 took place on July 26, 07 in Kumasi.

A year long activities has been planned for the celebrations and I extend an invitation to the membership and the general public to participate in the numerous events lined up at the regional and National levels.

As we look back on the 50 years of our existence, we can count the many achievements of the GMA. These include establishment of GHS, GCPS. Role in establishment of NHIS. Advocacy in Annual Public Lectures and Annual Health Week.

4x4 TOYOTA FORTUNER FOR THE GMA

The Association has bought a brand new 3-L Diesel Toyota Fortuner to facilitate the work of the GMA President and the National Secretariat

THE FUTURE GMA

My dear GMA members, the vision of the founding fathers of this great Association must never be lost on us. Let us stay together, rededicate ourselves to our shared professional aspirations and build a strong and viable GMA. The challenges may be enormous but if we remain united, we shall always triumph.

CONCLUSION

For the 2-years when I served as the GMA President, I received unalloyed support from the NEC, the Staff of the National Secretariat and a whole lot of people I cannot mention here who touched my life. I must have offended a few to deserve their condemnation. That, I believe is normal in any human endeavour especially occupying such a high office as I did. It has been very challenging but also highly fulfilling. I wish my successor a fruitful term in office.

Finally, I am grateful to my wife, Christie and family for their loyalty. Above all, I thank the Almighty God for bringing me this far.

Thank you for listening and May the good Lord bless us all.

Francis Adu-Ababio

GMA PREZ (2005 – 2007)

