

GPSF POSITION PAPER

Recommendations from the 14th Annual Conference for Ghanaian Healthcare Professionals (North America) to the MOH, Ghana

The Ghana Physicians and Surgeons Foundation of North America (GPSF) is a member-based organization of medical professionals in the US and Canada of Ghanaian heritage and/or who have a vested interest in working towards improved healthcare in Ghana. The GPSF was formed to support the mission of the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons; an institution established by an Act of Parliament in 2002 to provide quality postgraduate training in Ghana. In addition to this core mission, GPSF has supported several initiatives in Ghana by Ghanaian and other health professionals in North America. In the last three years, GPSF has played an advocacy role to influence health policy and educate the general public about numerous health care issues and challenges in Ghana.

The 14th annual GPSF conference organized for Ghanaian Healthcare professionals took place at the Renaissance Concourse Atlanta Hotel from April 22nd to 24th, 2016, with the theme 'A Critical Appraisal of Health Literacy in Africa – Challenges and Possible Solutions'. The conference attracted over 100 participants from the USA, Canada and Ghana. The anchoring academic sessions addressed a wide range of topics directly related to the conference theme. The conference attracted renowned and distinguished speakers from academia, healthcare practitioners, health services managers, entrepreneurs, as well as political leaders. Notably, Ghana's Minister of Health, Hon. Mr. Alexander P. Segbefia, accompanied by the Acting Chief Director, Ministry of Health, Dr. Afisah Zakaria, attended and addressed the gathering as well. All the speakers delivered very informative and thought provoking presentations. In the last three years the GPSF has entered into a dialogue with the Ministry of Health in Ghana and with other stakeholders aimed ultimately to find innovative solutions to improve healthcare delivery in Ghana.

During the two-day deliberations the following recommendations were made for the consideration of the Minister:

Recommendation 1: The MOH should make an effort at improving the level of health literacy of the general public. It was observed at the conference that there was global lack of health literacy among Ghanaians on several health issues

- Need for multisector and inter ministry strategies to improve health literacy
- The MOH should partner with the Ministry of Education to review the curriculum for health education in schools.
- Introduce dental health studies in the school curriculum from Junior High to Senior Secondary school and re-emphasize at all health professional schools
- Periodic campaigns for the Ghanaian general public on specific health issues. The content of the campaign messages should be easily understood by an individual with only elementary education
- Health Professional schools should include in their curriculums effective communication and education of the lay public on health issues.

Recommendation 2: The MOH should aggressively tap into the promise of modern technology to educate the general public.

- Media outlets such as television and radio are widely used in Ghana and can serve as a first point of contact to educate the general public on relevant health education topics.
- Billboards can also be widely used.
- Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. may also be successfully used to educate the general public on important health related topics.

Recommendation 3: The MOH should expedite the framework and launching of the Diaspora Medical Corps.

- The Diaspora Medical Corps will provide faculty for training of health personnel and service for unreached populations.
- The new University of Ghana Teaching Hospital will also benefit from the subspecialty expertise in the faculty bank of the Diaspora Medical Corps.
- Membership of the Foundation could be tapped into for pro bono consultation work on several aspects of health systems