

## RURAL HEALTH: FROM DISEASE ERADICATION TO MEDICAL FIELD UNITS

During the 1930's, reported rates of trypanosomiasis (Sleeping sickness) and yaws increased. Along with malaria, yaws was considered to be one of the biggest contributors to ill health in the country, with the heaviest burden in the north but a significant burden everywhere. In Accra, Cape Coast, Sekondi and Kumasi, 30% of children reporting to infant welfare centres had yaws. In 1937, the government undertook a trypanosomiasis control programme and 1944 a yaws eradication campaign was launched. Both campaigns were enormously successful in reducing the incidence of disease.

Governor Burns advocated for the continuation of medical services to rural areas as the eradication campaigns reached an end. He assigned personnel from the eradication campaigns to medical field units and arranged for them to receive additional training in the identification of several common diseases and pathogens in rural areas (such as malaria, guinea worm, bilharzias, leprosy) as well as training in basic vaccination and laboratory work. Headquarters was at Kintampo, centrally located for rural outreach work. Drs. Waddy and Saunders provided the leadership for the organization and development of the Medical Field Units.

Doctors such as Dr. Akiwumi, M.A. Barnor, and Frank Grant undertook groundbreaking medical research based out of the Medical Field Units, including the gathering of data on bilharzias, onchocerciasis, and guinea worm.