

## EDITORIAL

### MEDICAL TOURISM IN GHANA: THE ROLE OF THE GCPS

Medical tourism involves a patient travelling from his or her country to another one for medical care. In most instances Ghanaians travel to countries such as the USA, UK, South Africa and India for some medical care. It should be possible to reduce or reverse the unilateral flow of patients from Ghana. With the establishment of the GCPS, Ghana has seen a rapid increase in the number of doctors who are specializing or subspecializing in some unique areas in medicine and very soon, with the necessary tools and exposure, these doctors will acquire enough expertise to handle all cases. Also, apart from the teaching hospitals that have centres of excellence, we have in the country a few other public, private and quasi-state hospitals that also have these centres of excellence. When we pool our resources together we should be able to attract the foreign patients to the country. The nation stands a lot to gain economically and the medical and ancillary professions will develop remarkably.

The reasons for patients travelling to other countries include the lack of facilities and expertise in one's own country for the management of particular cases. A patient requiring a kidney or liver transplant in Ghana has to travel out. Other indications are dental care, cosmetic surgery, fertility treatment, organ and tissue transplant and cancer care. Travelling to another country involves a huge financial cost. There is always the risk of getting an infection in transit or as a hospital acquired one. Antibiotic resistance, poor quality of care, communication challenges and development of deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary embolism and lack of continuity of care are also common challenges. The patient has to take steps to minimize some of the risks. Pre-travel consultation has to be thorough. Health travel insurance has to be arranged. The patient should always

be accompanied by copies of the medical records. He/She should research into the health care provider and facility and also arrange for the follow up care. It is possible for the GCPS to set up a unit for the advocacy or coordination of medical tourism in Ghana since there is no central organization that has taken up the challenge in Ghana. Initially this can be done as a collaborative effort with the Ghana Health Service and the Ghana Medical Association. Such an effort will ensure orderliness in the venture and profitability in medical tourism.

The global medical tourism is estimated to yield billions of dollars. Countries such as the UAE and Qatar are getting a lot of money from the well -organized medical tourism. Ghana can chalk a similar feat and improve the economy of the country as a whole. Ghana can adopt and employ telemedicine to enhance medical tourism. We will use technology to deliver clinical care at remote and distant locations. It can be as simple as text messaging or as complex as a remotely controlled surgery. Real time video communication, remote monitoring, store- and-forward, storing and sharing medical information can all be developed. We will be careful with internet glitches, medicolegal issue and cost and maintenance of equipment.

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#### References

1. [www.nc.cdc.gov](http://www.nc.cdc.gov)
2. American Medical Association Ethical Guidance on Medical Tourism.

