

EDITORIAL

DENTAL HEALTH IN GHANA

The Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons celebrated her 10th anniversary last year (December 2013). The theme "Ten years of postgraduate medical education in Ghana" was very appropriate and afforded an opportunity to assess the College's achievements in terms of manpower development in the medical, surgical and dental specialties. Because the College's mandate is postgraduate training, the discussions were largely on specialist training by the various faculties of the College. It was heart-warming to note that the Faculty of Dentistry has turned out several specialists and a few have embarked on senior residency training towards achieving consultant status.

The much needed information with respect to dental health in Ghana is the numbers of dentists currently in the system and what impact they are having on dental health of Ghanaians. Questions arise about whether there is enough awareness by the ordinary Ghanaian, of the importance of and the need to promote good dental health, especially in children. The two dental schools in Ghana have so far, produced less than 200 dental graduates. With projected increase in undergraduate student enrolment for dentistry, the numbers are likely to increase, but will it be at the rate likely to meet the dental health needs of a population of 25 million that is rapidly increasing?

In this issue of the PMJG, Hewlett et al give us an insight into dental education in Ghana, with emphasis on postgraduate dental education. Their account

exposes the dismal picture of grossly inadequate numbers of trained dentists in the system and an even graver situation with respect to specialists in dentistry. Of the several specialist areas in dentistry the majority are not represented at all in Ghana. Important subspecialties such as Community Dentistry and Paediatric Dentistry are sadly, poorly represented. As a result, dental health programmes for schoolchildren that are commonplace in developed countries are virtually non-existent in Ghana.

The pertinent question is whether major stakeholders such as, the ministries of Health and Education are aware of the extent of the problem. Are there national policies on training health personnel in the so-called deprived areas of medicine and dentistry? Hewlett et al suggest affirmative action as a way to encourage students, as well as medical and dental graduates to train in these undersubscribed areas of health care. Dentistry is not alone in this predicament. Specialist areas such as, Laboratory Medicine, Radiology, Nuclear Medicine, Anaesthesia and Radio-oncology are but some of the grossly 'deprived' areas of medicine that require urgent attention in order to improve health care delivery to Ghanaians. The Ministry of Health (especially the Ghana Health Service), in collaboration with the College of Physicians and Surgeons may consider setting up a special sponsorship programme for urgent training of medical and dental graduates in these 'deprived' areas.

Editor-in-Chief