

PRESBYTERIAN HEALTH SERVICES.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) attaches much importance to the welfare of the poor and vulnerable in the society. She is obliged, as a church, to support the society by providing their spiritual and physical needs. The provision of social services by the church is, therefore, a mandate our Lord has given us to serve His people. This vision of PCG in the health sector, therefore, is to serve the poor through the provision of holistic, affordable and quality health service in fulfillment of Christ's mandate to go and **“heal the sick who are there and tell them, the kingdom of God is near you”**. (Luke 10: 9 NIV).

The health services programme of the PCG which was started about 124 years ago by Dr. Rudolf Fich on a humble beginning, has developed and expanded to benefit thousands of people in and outside Ghana.

The first ever mission hospital in the then Gold Coast, according to Rev. Dr. D.N.A. Kpobi, in his book, Triple Heritage, was established in 1885 by the Church at Kom (Aburi). Although this facility developed well for some years, with the onset of the First World War and the consequent deportation of the Basel Missionaries, it collapsed. After the war, work at the facility resumed, but only for a short period due to lack of funding.

The construction of a new hospital at Agogo in the Asante Akyem area started in 1929, and was completed in 1930. The official opening of this facility was done by the then British Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Alexander Ransford Slater on March 21, 1931.

On January 1, 1979, Agogo Hospital was given a substantive status of a District Hospital for the Asante Akyem area. It is the oldest church hospital in Ghana.

With communal labour, the construction of Dormaa State Hospital started in 1953 and was completed in 1954. The official opening of the facility took place at the end of 1954. In 1955, the management of the hospital was transferred to the Basel Mission which sent a Dutch female doctor, Dr. Emmy Ode, as the first medical officer in-charge of the hospital. Until the end of 1959, the hospital was financed by the Basel Mission and the Dormaa State with assistance from the Government of Ghana.

The upgrading of the facility to a district hospital in 1976 required some infrastructural improvements. In September, 1976, at the request of and in

consultation with the then Regional Medical officer and the Hospital Board, Dr. Van Es started work on an application for the expansion of the hospital. In 1978, the project was approved by one of the Church's overseas partners, Inter Church Organization for Development Co-operation (ICCO) and the Dutch Government. By the end of the project in 1984, a new maternity, children- and isolation wards, a store and some staff houses had been provided in Dormaa Hospital.

The two other hospitals at Bawku and Donkorkrom were handed over by the Government of Ghana to the Church to manage in 1956 and 1985 respectively. They are the government recognized district hospitals in their respective areas.

The Church did not stop at providing only medical care. It saw the need to provide primary health care services in the rural communities. A Primary Health Care (PHC) Programme, then called Rural Health Service Programme, was started in the Asante Akyem area by the Church, in collaboration with the Government of Ghana in 1979. Agogo Hospital provided a District Medical Officer while the Ministry of Health provided the other technical staff. The programme did not end in the then Asante Akyem District. The Church extended it to Dormaa, Bolgatanga, Bawku, Sandema, Salaga, Tamale Rural, Afram Plains and Aowin-Suaman (Enchi).

The Church was training nurses in Agogo Hospital before the Second World War (1939 – 1945). This programme was temporarily suspended during the war. By 1986, 184 nurses had been trained. Realizing the need to serve the northern regions, a second nurses' training programme was started at Bawku Hospital by the Church. The two training colleges trained nurses sponsored by Agogo, Bawku and other church health institutions. Currently, they train nurses for both Church and public health institutions.

The PCG has become a major player in health service delivery in the country. It is currently running a total of forty (40) health institutions in the country. These are made up of:

- Four (4) District Hospitals
- Nine (9) Sub-District Primary Health Care Outreach Programmes
- Twenty-four (24) Health Centres and Clinics
- Two (2) Nurses' Training Colleges
- One (1) Health Technical Unit

- These institutions provide a substantial portion of rural health services. The church is currently the third largest single provider of health services in the

country. Agogo, Bawku and Dormaa Hospitals provide specialist services in ophthalmology. Also, while Agogo Hospital provides specialist services in general surgery, paediatrics and internal medicine Bawku Hospital provides orthopaedic services.

- Within the structure of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), the Church also cooperates with other Christian health service providers. At local, district, regional and national levels, the PCG collaborates with the government and other agencies operating in the health sector.
- Within the frame work of the PCG, the health institutions are under the direction of the Committee on Health and Environment that is responsible for advising the Church on health and environmental issues.
- As Christian health institutions, the hospitals and clinics provide free medical care to the most vulnerable in the society under a poor and sick fund. In 2008, the institutions spent GH¢ 24,848.95 on 1116 poor patients, an average of GH¢ 22.27 per patient. They also spent GH¢ 12,672.84 on the feeding of these poor patients apart from paying lorry fares and buying clothing for some of them. Many more poor patients would have been catered for from the poor and sick fund, but for limited financial resources.
- Currently, the Church has no health facility in eight of her fifteen Presbyteries. These Presbyteries are Ga, Akyem-Abuakwa, West-Akyem, Volta, Dangbe-Tongu, Sekyere, Central and Brong-Ahafo. The Asante Presbytery has only one facility. This situation calls for vigorous effort on the part of the Church to mobilize local resources for the establishment of new facilities in these Presbyteries and for the expansion of existing ones in the next five years.