

IN MEMORIAM

The Postgraduate Medical Journal of Ghana announces with great sadness the passing of its Editor-in-Chief, Professor Joseph Darkwah Seffah. The sad event happened on the 22nd January 2024.

The College, as well as staff of the Editorial Office of the College mourn the passing of their beloved Editor who has served the College with such hard work and quiet efficiency and express their condolences to his dear wife and children, as well as the entire extended family.

A fitting Tribute contributed by one of his close friends, is published in this issue of the Journal and gives a brief account of the stature of the departed Editor-in-Chief of the Journal.

May the soul of Joseph Darkwah Seffah rest in perfect peace!



PROFESSOR JOSEPH DARKWA SEFFAH

Isaiah 55:8,9. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Amen.

Preamble

It is with heavy heart that I write this tribute to my bosom friend with whom I have been associated since we first met in the Premed Class of the University of Ghana in October 1976 i.e. nearly 48 years. We became friends the first time we met but the friendship grew stronger when we joined the postgraduate training programme at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in October / November 1988.

Early Life

Professor Darkwah Seffah, popularly known as JD, was born on the first day of September 1956. He started his Primary and Middle School education in Kumasi. He was very brilliant and he sat for the Common Entrance Examination in 1969 whereupon he gained admission to the popular Prempeh College in Kumasi. He passed his GCE Ordinary Level examination with Distinction in 1974. He had the 2-year Sixth form Education in science at the same school and in 1976 passed the GCE Advanced Level Examination with flying colours.

Medical School Life

He gained admission to the University of Ghana Medical School [UGMS] in October 1976. He concentrated on his studies and sailed through medical school with relative ease. He passed his examinations at the first attempt. In May 1982 he passed the final conjoint examinations of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of surgery [MB CHB] to become a practising physician.

Early Working Life

After the swearing – in ceremony on 12th June 1982, JD started the Housemanship in General surgery and Child Health. Soon after the Housemanship in 1983, he had the opportunity to travel to Nigeria where he lived with his wife, Leticia. He returned after 2 years and was posted to Tetteh Quarshie Memorial Hospital at Akwapim Mampong where he worked till 1988. He worked under Dr. Neequaye, an Obstetrician Gynaecologist, who ignited the passion for Obstetrics & Gynaecology in him. JD proceeded to the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital for postgraduate Training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 1988. In those days the postgraduate students stayed in Korle-Bu and passed the Part 1 Examination of the West African College of Surgeons then proceeded to the United Kingdom for the Membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Rather, unfortunately, this trend was truncated and the training was completely localised under the Canergie – Ghana Postgraduate

Training Program. JD and I did not want to be called Residents forever so we had to study hard to pass all the Examinations on time. We spent a lot of time in the departmental library from 7 – 10 pm whenever we were both free. Those were the days when there were very few residents but with a rather very high workload. When we were getting ready for our Part 1 Examination, I had the misfortune of having to do my usual Team A duty followed by Team C duty after 48 hours. This was very exhausting but JD was always there to relieve me of some of the extra burden. ***He was such a loyal friend.***

The “struggle continued unabated” till we passed the Final Part II Fellowship Examination in 1994. The Fellowship of the West African College of Surgeons (Faculty of Obstetrics and Gynaecology) was conferred on us at a colourful ceremony in Abidjan in 1995.

Late working Life

We were appointed Specialists in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 1994. Both of us applied to join the University of Ghana Medical School in 1994 but we didn't receive any reply to our applications till late 1996 when I was on a long holiday in the Republic of South Africa. When he received his invitation letter to the interview, he immediately asked for mine. He went to inform the Dean of UGMS that I was out of the country so he suggested a video or conference call for my interview but that did not materialise. There were only 2 places so they were given to the late Prof. S. A. Obed and JD. Our postgraduate students [Residents] thought they were not getting enough tuition from their teachers at the time. I, therefore, discussed the issue with JD that I would like us to start preparing them for the West African College of Surgeons Examinations; he immediately agreed and we started taking them on Saturday mornings. This continued till the Covid-19 pandemic struck.

By dint of hard work, JD rose gradually to become a Full Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 2016 before his official retiring age. He was a researcher and a writer with many publications to his credit. Apart from the journal articles he also wrote book chapters for local and foreign books. He was my co-author to the popular “HANDBOOK OF GYNAECOLOGY: A Practical Guide to Student and Practitioner” popularly known as TWO TEACHERS. His contribution to the preparation of my initial book “HANDBOOK OF OBSTETRICS: A Practical Guide to the Management of High-Risk Obstetric Patients” was immense. ***I am forever grateful to this wonderful friend.***

He taught and mentored many Medical Students, Residents, Senior Residents, Specialists, Senior

Specialists and Consultants. He also mentored some of the Lecturers in the Department. JD together with me, Dr. Lucie Moravia and Prof. Timothy Johnson were instrumental in starting the Maternal Fetal Medicine (MFM) Programme of the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons. Indeed, JD and the late Dr. J. O. Armah set up the MFM Unit of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the UGMS and KBTH to offer high level care for pregnant women and their unborn children. The 2 names mentioned here were involved in performing advanced Ultrasound Examinations on the pregnant women. The centre has collaboration with many institutions around the globe. He held various positions in the University of Ghana including Vice Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Deputy Provost of the College of Health Sciences. At the University he served on many Committees and Boards; he chaired some of them with distinction. He retired officially in 2016 and has been on contract since then.

Postgraduate Medical College Activities West African College of Surgeons

He served as Secretary for the Faculty of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the West African College of Surgeons for 4 years and later the Faculty Chairman and Chief Examiner for another 4 years. During his tenure as Faculty Chairman, Chief Examiner and Faculty Board Chairman, he brought significant changes to the Fellowship Examinations. He introduced the use of Objectively Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) at the Membership [Part 1] Examination. Since then, many Faculties of the College have also adopted same. He also started some of the Subspecialty Training Programmes in the WACS. JD was such a wise and witty administrator that before he started the OSCE he constituted a Planning Committee and put the renowned Nigerian Professor and a former Internal Assessor [Prof Fakeye] in the Chair while he sat in as a member. He made sure that he placed on the committee the three leading Ghanaians who had developed OSCE for UGMS namely Prof. K. Nkyekyer, Dr Ali Samba and me. It was very difficult working with our colleagues from Nigeria but JD kept his calm and we succeeded. We initially started with the Gynae OSCE and then later Obstetrics. Because of the harmonisation of the various colleges in West Africa we also had to start same in the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons at the Membership Level. This was easily done because of our past experience.

Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons

At the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons (GCPS) he became a Foundation Fellow in 2003 and an Examiner for the College from 2005 until his untimely demise. He was appointed the Editor – In – Chief for the GCPS Journal, “Postgraduate Medical Journal of Ghana” in 2015; he was active on the job until his untimely demise. He was very hard working sometimes spending sleepless nights just to make sure the journal came out on schedule to the admiration of

authors. It must be mentioned here also that JD was a reviewer for other journals such as the International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Ghana Medical Journal.

Examinership

JD has been an excellent Examiner for many examination bodies including, the Medical and Dental Council of Ghana; Nurses and Midwives Council, West African College of Surgeons; Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University For Development Studies, Cape Coast University etc.

Other activities

He once held the position of Secretary for the Ghana Research Society. He continued to become the President of the society, a position he held for 2 years. He organised the activities of the Society with zeal and improved on the membership. We attended many conferences together and JD always made sure he made a presentation at each conference be it local or international. He was a Friend of FIGO. He had an award for one of his earlier articles in the “International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics”.

Family life

JD married early and they had 3 lovely children [2 sons and a daughter] who are grown now. The senior son is an accountant and the remaining 2 are Specialist Doctors. These children are also like siblings to my children. The family ties have been very strong. JD and his wife were very serious with the care of their children. They supplied the needs of the children with adequate entertainment so that they never lacked anything even when it was very tough for us to make the ends meet. I must confess here that at a point in time we nearly stopped the postgraduate training as life became very tough and unbearable but by the grace of God we managed to persevere to the end.

Christian life

JD was a devout Christian of the Presbyterian Faith. Upon his return to KBTH in 1988, he joined the Ebenezer Congregation at Mamprobi with his family. He held various positions in the Congregation before his demise. He was very punctual at church service and he always sat at a particular area that even the Senior Minister remembers very well.

Social life

Even though he was busy with his patient care and research he still managed to keep serious ties with his family and friends. He attended the Prempeh Old Students Association meetings. He also made many professional friends.

End of life

Within 2 months of my friend complaining of what looked like a benign problem we were surprised to hear

of his admission at the UGMC and within a few days he had been called to his maker. It has to be pointed out that JD was at the sod-cutting ceremony for the UGMC as the Deputy Provost of the College of Health Sciences. JD left us when the applause was loudest. We thought we needed him but the Lord knows best.

Summary

In summary JD has been a very good friend not only to me but to many others. He has been a mentor to many medical students, Residents, Specialists and Consultants. He has also been a wonderful researcher and academic. At the clinical level he has been a very good and hard-working Consultant Obstetrician / Gynaecologist with vast experience in teaching clinical and surgical skills to the up-and-coming Obstetrician Gynaecologists. Indeed, he has been a leader in training the next generation of Obstetrician Gynaecologists.

A Medical Giant has fallen and the void created will be felt in Ghana, West Africa and indeed other parts of the world.

Gratitude

As we part company I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to JD for his sincere companionship. I thank God for giving us such a gem whom we have cherished to this day. He will be forever remembered in our hearts.

FAREWELL

Fare thee well my good friend, Professor J. D. Seffah, Professeur Extraordinaire, and may you find eternal rest in the bosom of the Lord. DAMIRIFA DUE!!!

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