

Great Leap In Producing Health Professionals

Written by Kesete Ghebrehiwet



Eritrea's remarkable achievements in different economic sectors is steadily drawing recognition and acclaim. As part of the substantial investment in various domains to expand social services across the nation, concerted actions have been taken to upgrade the human resources in the health care system. Building human capacity has not been confined to nurturing human power at degree-diploma level. Special emphasis has been given to the task of providing higher specialization courses in various health fields beyond training medical doctors. The pioneer achievement registered last year in graduating 31 medical doctors and eight pediatricians from Orotta School of Medicine is now followed by another landmark achievement of graduating five surgeons from Orotta's School of Post Graduate Medical Education.

The number of health care specialists trained on the basis of the country's internal resources since the launching of Orotta Medical School in 2004 has been evermore increasing. This impressive achievement is indeed a promise for more to come. With such achievements, the Eritrean society will therefore definitely get good health care services at ease for the number of health graduates would redouble in many folds in the near future.

As Dr. Haile Mezghebe, Medical Director of the Post Graduate Medical School stated, since the opening of Orotta School of Medicine, the number of students studying to become medical doctors has increased from around 50 to 300 at present.

Surgery residency training program has now started with the achievement of this year's graduating class through which the prospects of providing as many surgeons have now become very vivid. The realization of this milestone accomplishment in the health sector is in fact the outcome of the concerted efforts on the part of the entire health care community which Dr. Haile attributed to the excellent dedication of the Nurses, Doctors, pharmacists, surgeons, administrators and managers which stand as a testimony of the progressive improvements attained each year.

The capabilities of the students who have been trained in different areas of medical education have been approved by experts from the United Kingdom, the United States, some others from the Middle East and other countries in Africa. "The comments we get from the visiting faculties who have a great deal of experience, consistently tells us how really qualified and capable our

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students are.” Dr. Haile said.

The courses that have been offered in the post graduate medical education (PGME) program include pediatrics, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology. In addition to the five surgery specialist graduates, Dr. Haile stated that seven more pediatricians who have been trained are expected to graduate next year would increase the existing number of specialists in pediatrics to threefold. “Very soon, every major hospital in Eritrea will have at least one fully trained pediatric specialist among its medical staff. By the time the group of five specialists in obstetrics and gynecology finish their training, Eritrea will be on its way to be one of the first and few African countries to achieve the MDG,” the doctor said.

The achievements registered so far have been really crucial in laying the foundation for the future programs that would be implemented to further broaden the health care system's out reach throughout the country. According to Dr. Haile, preliminary preparations have been made to begin postgraduate training programs in the fields of Internal Medicine, Anesthesia, Orthopedics, Neuropsychiatry, Pathology, Ophthalmology and Emergency Medicine among others.



We have very qualified and competent human power trained and working as doctors as well. All they needed was an opportunity to improve themselves. The opportunity the Ministry of Health has created allows them to be able to improve and enrich their potential.

As regards future plans of training more surgical specialists, Dr. Haile went on to say that the post graduate training is just in the beginning, but the ultimate goal is to produce up to 15 surgeons every year. “As teachers, researchers, leaders, and patient care providers, we need so many surgeons. We will continue to do the same in internal medicine and many other related fields as well,” he elaborated.

Dr. Haile remarked upon the competence of the trained doctors as follows: “The trainees studied very rigorous type of academic science. Moreover, they had to put in to practice what they learned. They have been practicing, observing, and evaluating patients. They had also to operate on patients and follow the result of the operation. It is a multiple level of teaching, learning, reading, and implementing what they learned and continuing to improve along the process. They have been conducting surgery for the last three years under supervision. They are excellent surgeons. They will conduct surgery and would also teach others do that as well.

In response to whether the graduates are capable of conducting surgery independently the

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doctor says they can conduct brain and cardiac surgery with assistance. As general practitioners of surgery they can operate on tumors, abdominal problems, goiter among others.

Dr. Solomon Gebreigziabiher, one of the five graduate surgeons learned a lot from the experienced local and international doctors. Apart from general surgery practitioners; he explained that they have also been studying sub-specialists courses. For instance, he said, "I have been pursuing my studies in urology and my colleagues are specializing in pediatrics, and laparoscopic surgery.

As Dr. Haile stated during the commencement of the surgery specialists that was held at National Union of Eritrean workers hall on the 26th of November, 2010, in the overall scheme of the government of Eritrea and the ministry of health, the launching of a medical school is only the first phase of a long term strategy. Tribute was also given to the late Minister of Health, Mr. Saleh Meki who was instrumental in the launching of the medical school.