

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Dr. Vincent I.O. Agyapong

In 2016, despite having just been appointed Edmonton Zone Clinical Section Chief for Community Mental Health, Dr. Agyapong could not rest easy knowing that the people of Fort McMurray were suffering from trauma-related mental health issues, with only three psychiatrists in town and no services at all for children and youth except those sporadically provided via telehealth from Edmonton. So he volunteered to provide psychiatric consultation in Fort McMurray for one full week per month, adding to an already demanding schedule, until two additional psychiatrists were recruited last year. Since then, in order to meet the ongoing need for mental health services, he continues to provide psychiatric consultations, to support family physicians and to assist with the on-call program in Fort McMurray.



Dr. Vincent Agyapong (Photo credit: Bryan Cooper of Cooper & O'Hara Photography)

Not only does he do this with a full and demanding schedule in Edmonton, he also continues to volunteer in his home country of Ghana. In 2009, Ghana had only four resident psychiatrists for a population of over 20 million, and poor infrastructure for mental health care did little to encourage Ghanaian medical students to enter the field of psychiatry.

Dr. Agyapong began travelling there annually to teach undergraduate medical students at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology at no cost to the university. Between 2009 and 2013, he delivered the bulk of the psychiatry curriculum at that institution, which had no psychiatrist on the faculty. He also launched a program to enable Ghanaian medical students to receive fully sponsored elective placements in psychiatry in Irish institutions, with 23 students so far having received sponsorship, and the number of psychiatrists in Ghana has subsequently increased from four to 18, with another 27 residents in psychiatry currently training with the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons.

In addition, in order to help address the treatment gap for mental health in Africa and elsewhere, Dr. Agyapong designed a curriculum for an international Masters Program in Mental Health Policy, Services, and Development that received accreditation from the Ghana Accreditation Board and the Academic Board of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. He recruited volunteer faculty from the University of Alberta, University of Alabama, University of Dublin, Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Ghana to teach the program. It launched in the 2018-19 academic year with 16 students from Ghana and Nigeria enrolled; the goal is to produce well-trained global mental health professionals who have received international education in the African and lower-and-middle-income-country context and can design, implement and evaluate global mental health programs and services to expand access to care.

He volunteers his time to coordinate both the intensive residential and the online learning sessions of the program from Canada and travels to Ghana at his own cost twice a year during the intensive residential sessions.

Dr. Agyapong has demonstrated enormous compassion and a willingness – indeed, an eagerness – to go out of his way to care for people who would otherwise not have access to the care they need. The people of Alberta and Ghana, in particular, have benefitted greatly from his work on their behalf.