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## Inter-College Lecture -College of Humanities

**Date:** Thursday, May 26, 2022 - 16:30

**Venue:** Main Auditorium, ISSER

### Inter-College Lecture - College of Humanities

**Lecturer:** Rev. Professor Yaa Adobea Owusu.

**Title of Lecture:** COVID-19, Health and Healthcare Services In Ghana

**Date:** 26th May 2022.

**Time:** 4:30 p.m.

**Venue:** Main Auditorium, ISSER.

**Chairman:** Professor Daniel Frimpong Ofori, Provost, College of Humanities.

### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has now literally been downgraded in Ghana, with most of the restriction protocols eased. Nevertheless, COVID-19 is still with us, and still needs to be treated with caution, even as newer variants are announced every now and then. Of uttermost importance is the trail of effects it brought to citizens' health, and healthcare services the world over, including Ghana. Some of these effects will last for decades. Based on Ghana's COVID-19 recovery and case-fatality rate, relative to those of other African countries and the world's average COVID-19 related indicators, Ghana has successfully managed and treated the pandemic. Ghana was the first country internationally to receive vaccines from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization's (GAVI) COVAX facility, the COVID-19 vaccine drive initiative supported by the WHO and UNICEF, for African and other less developed countries. GoG planned to vaccinate all its adult population, estimated at 20 million, by the end of 2021, to generate herd immunity.

COVID-19 has had a strong negative psycho-social effect on several aspects of the livelihoods of citizens. Among others, this situation stemmed from the financial insecurities engineered by the pandemic, the fear of infection, deaths from it, and the fear of death. In Ghana, another contributory

factor to the psycho-social stress and mental health burden unleashed by COVID-19 is the stigma and stigmatization, and the reduced social space associated with the infection, and its concomitant social restrictions. This is against the background of Ghana's current mental healthcare services being at a very low ebb and with very low funding. Furthermore, Ghana and Africa have a reduced capacity for COVID-19 research.

As is the case globally, COVID-19 also highlighted the inequities in access to and distribution of healthcare infrastructure in the country. Locally, these are the usual dichotomies of the north-south, rural-urban, and Greater Accra Region versus the-rest-of-the-country divides. For instance, as at September 28, 2021, 10 regions in Ghana did not have any suitable COVID-19 accredited testing laboratories while 29 out of the 36 accredited laboratories with the capacity to test for COVID-19 (constituting 80.56%), were in the Greater Accra Region, mostly in wealthier enclaves of Accra.

GoG and the Ghana Health Service's concentration on COVID-19 had a high opportunity cost in terms of financing, logistics for, and healthcare provision for other equally important diseases and healthcare needs such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and maternal and child healthcare. Furthermore, research has shown that some citizens stopped seeking healthcare for essential services for fear of COVID-19 infection. Similarly, some elderly, very experienced healthcare personnel quit working to protect themselves. There was also a very high healthcare worker stress and psychosocial burden. These thwarted efforts to promote good health, led to worsened ailments and loss of lives which were not directly related to COVID-19, and may have long term effects on the healthcare space and citizens' health in Ghana.

On a positive note, the pandemic occasioned the expansion of the healthcare infrastructure and services, and the much needed increase in the healthcare manpower in Ghana. The pandemic has also led to lessons on self-reliance in providing healthcare logistics, as well as increased voluntarism in providing healthcare support from citizens.

Given the massive negative impact of the pandemic on the mental health and psychological well-being of citizens, GoG, the Ghana Health Service, and allied agencies should step up mental health, clinical psychology, and psychosocial services to support citizens to cope with the fallout and the increased demand for mental and psycho-social healthcare related to the pandemic.

There is the need for pragmatic efforts to distribute healthcare infrastructure more evenly, regionally, and also across the rural-urban, north-south divides, particularly in the provision of suitable laboratories that can test for the pandemic, in order to more equitably and efficiently prevent infections and treat persons who get infected by COVID-19 nationwide. GoG should ensure that at least one well-resourced COVID-19 testing center/laboratory is built in each region to facilitate more timely testing, treatment and needed documentation, such as for external travel, in the wake of the pandemic's geopolitics. Increased and continuous self-reliant in providing our healthcare supplies, including vaccines, is recommended.

There is the need for Ghana to be camera-ready for unavoidable future epidemics and pandemics. GoG and private partners should facilitate the intensification of scientific and social research on COVID-19 as well as other epidemics in Ghana. This should include the impact of the pandemic on healthcare workers.

## **Profile**

**Rev. Prof. Adobea Yaa Owusu, PhD, MPH**

## **Professional positions held (select)**

**Adobea Yaa Owusu** is an Associate Professor, and immediate past Head of the Social Division, Institute of Statistical, Social, and Economic Research (ISSER), College of Humanities, University of Ghana, Legon (a position she has held on two occasions). She currently teaches PhD level courses in Population, Health and Environment, and Theories of Social Change, at the University of Ghana. Prof. Adobea Owusu was also a founding member and a former Adjunct Lecturer at of the University of Ghana's School of Public Health (SPH) and a founding member and former Adjunct Lecturer of the Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the SPH, UG.

## **Previous working life (select)**

In her past life, she served as an Assistant Health Educator, and later, a Health Educator, with the then Health Education Unit of the Ministry of Health, currently Health Promotion Division of the Ghana Health Service, where she was intermittently seconded to work with the current Health Research and Resource Development Division of the Ghana Health Services (GHS) (formerly Health Research Unit of the Ministry of Health). Again, she was a founding staff of the Health Research Unit of the Ministry of Health. Immediately before coming to work at the University of Ghana in September 2005, and immediately after her return to Ghana after her postgraduate studies abroad, she worked as a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist on the USAID Ghana's "Ghana Sustainable Change Project"—A health communication project, for one year, as a staff of the US-based Manoff Group. She also served as an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the Accra College of Medicine, East Legon, Accra, and taught a course on "Medicine, Patients and Society", in September 2016-June 2017 and September 2018 to February 2020.

## **Higher education**

She had her bachelor's (BSc. Home Science [hons.]—1986) and a post-graduate diploma in Communication Studies (1991) from the University of Ghana, Legon. She furthered her education at the University of North Texas' (UNT) School of Biomedical Sciences, Fort Worth, Texas, USA (Master of Public Health, fall 2000) and UNT, Denton, Texas, USA (Master of Arts [fall 1996] and PhD [fall 2002]), respectively.

## **Professional specialisation (select)**

Professor Adobea Owusu is a Social Epidemiologist, Health/Health Services Researcher, and a professional Health Educator and Behaviour Change Communicator. Her specialisations are in medical sociology, public health, social and behavioural health, monitoring and evaluation, health services research, formative research, women's reproductive health, adolescent reproductive health, and health communication/health education materials development.

## **Current research**

Her current research focuses on COVID-19; HIV/AIDS; domestic and intimate partner violence; access to health care; health services' output and quality of care; development and health; and monitoring and evaluation. She has been a part of an international research consortium that has been undertaking an ethnographic study of the interphase between the socio-economic and

behavioural health of the residents of the Lower Manya Krobo District/Municipality, Ghana, for about ten years now.

## **Service at the University of Ghana (select)**

Prof. Owusu has served on several boards and committees of the University of Ghana, including currently serving as a member of the Academic Board; the Academic Board of the College of

Humanities; the Academic Board of the College of Health Sciences; and the Chaplaincy Board. She is a past member of the Scientific and Technical Committee, Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research.

### **Other intellectual activities (select)**

Prof. Owusu has been a Visiting Fellow for several years at the Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. She has also served as a Visiting Scholar to the School of Government, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa; and the Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, St. Johns, Canada.

She has been an academic supervisor for 59 graduate students including three students from Universities abroad. Her work with a US-based student she co-supervised won the prestigious award of Excellence in Abstract Submissions on an International Topic, from the HIV/AIDS Section of the American Public Health Association, for the 145th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association in November 2017.

### **Publications, conferences, and peer review of journals**

She has 79 peer reviewed publications and six peer reviewed, published policy briefs. She has been a reviewer for over 12 international journals. Prof. Adobea Owusu has presented papers at over 100 local and international workshops, seminars and conferences.

### **Community Service (select)**

She is a Fellow of the Mensah Sarbah Hall and a Tutor at the Adum Kwapong Hall, University of Ghana. Prof. Adobea Owusu is currently an External Examiner for the Presbyterian University College and a Board Member of the Governing Council, Wintech Professional Institute, Darkuman, Accra, Ghana. She is also an External Subject Matter Reviewer for the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission since 2012. Furthermore, she has been serving on the National Steering Committee of the Data Quality Assurance Framework of the Ghana Statistical Service since August 2019.

Prof. Adobea Owusu was also a member of the Technical Committee for the Revision of Ghana's (National) Population Policy and Action Plans for the last two occasions it has been revised: the 1969 version which was revised in 1994, and the 1994 version which was revised in March 2014-November, 2015.

Prof. Owusu has also consulted for both local and international agencies, departments and private entities. Among others, she was a key part of the Ministry of Health's and the Ghana Health Service's Safe Motherhood Initiative, Adolescent Reproductive Health, School Health, Traditional Birth Attendant Project, and Managing Malaria in Pregnancy Project. Additionally, she was the Ghana-based national Lead Researcher in the Ghana Health Services' Fortification of Salt and Wheat Flour Project in 2007-2008, as well as the change over from the use of chloroquine as a first line drug of treatment, to the use of Combined Therapy in 2005-2006.

Rev. Prof. Owusu is an ordained Reverend Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. She leads two other Reverend Ministers in the Chaplaincy of the Ga Presbytery Campus Ministry, including Presbyterian students at the University of Ghana, Legon.

### **Family life**

Prof. Owusu has two sons.

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