

Annual Report 2008



2008 ANNUAL REPORT

By Dr Oheneba Owusu-Danso, Secretary, CMA

Brief Introduction

The Commonwealth Medical Association was established on 1969. The role of the Association is to promote, assist, and strengthen the capacities of the composite national medical associations of countries within the Commonwealth and provide leadership and services for the benefit of the health and welfare of the people within the Commonwealth.

The CMA is an independent civil society organisation which is governed by the Council of Association. The Association is administered by the Executive guided by the decisions of the Council and it is committed to an open and transparent relationship with its stakeholders. In carrying out its constitutional mandate the Executive works closely with a diverse group of people and organizations including other health professionals and social services providers, private and voluntary providers nationally and internationally. The Commonwealth Secretariat and its funding agency, the Commonwealth Foundation remain the key stakeholders.

This annual report summarises the work of the Executive from its election in November 2007 to December 2008.

21st Triennial Meeting, Chennai, India

The 21st Triennial Council meeting was held on November 23, 2007 at Hotel Green Park, Chennai, India. The meeting was attended by the Executive members of the Association and the Presidents or official delegation leaders of the national medical associations. In the absence of the President, Prof A B Akosa, who sent apologies for his inability to attend, the meeting was chaired by the immediate past president, Dr Krishnan of Malaysia.

The meeting reviewed decisions of the triennial meeting held in Ghana in 2004, the work of the former Executive and its achievements. The meeting praised the 2004-2007

Executive for the remarkable achievements in the midst of the challenges that confronted it on assumption of office. These included;

- the role of the CMA in making substantial input and leading the organization of the civil society forum as part of the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November 2005.
- the special and strategic meeting of the Executive in January 2006 during which decisions were taken to reposition the CMA.
- the adoption of a five-year business plan which has become the association's blueprint for various strategic meetings and projects with the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and other stakeholders on global health issues.
- the return of the British Medical Association into the fold of the CMA
- the successful hosting of two major scientific conferences namely; the Patient Safety workshop in Malta and the Symposium on Capacity building for HIV/AIDS Treatment and Care in Africa held in Uganda and
- formal re-location of the CMA Headquarters in London, UK.

The Council meeting was hosted under the auspices of the India Medical Association and as part of the annual scientific conference of the College of General Practitioners of the IMA.

Elections of Officers for 2007-2010.

As part of the triennial meeting, elections were held and the following officers were elected for the subsequent triennium 2007-2010. The Executive was thus constituted as follows;

1. Dr Sundara Arulraj, India Medical Association, President
2. Prof A B Akosa, Ghana Medical Association, Immediate Past President
3. Dr Oheneba Owusu-Danso, Ghana Medical Association, Secretary
4. Dr Myra Tilney, Medical Association of Malta, Treasurer
5. Dr Margaret Mungherera, Uganda Medical Association, Vice-President for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa region
6. Prof Wole Atoyebi, Nigerian Medical Association, Vice-President , West Africa
7. Dr Jean Paul Tabone, Medical Association of Malta, Vice-President for European region

8. Dr N. Arumugam, Malaysia Medical Association, Vice-President for S E Asia/Australia region
9. Dr Ajay Kamar, India Medical Association, Vice-President for Central Asia region

Relocation of the Secretariat to London

The CMA has had its secretariat hosted by the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) since 2002 following the resignation of the then administrative manager, Marianne Harslegrave and the withdrawal of the BMA. However after negotiations which led to the return of the BMA and an agreement for the provision of office accommodation and secretarial materials, the Executive decided to relocate the secretariat back to London. The relocation was further negotiated with the MAM led by Dr Martin Balzan, then CMA secretary to be effective from April 2007. Owing to delays in setting up the office and the recruitment of personnel the objective was finally realized on November 1, 2007. The headquarters which is now located in the international department of the BMA House has the following business address and communication details;

Commonwealth Medical Association

International Department, BMA House,

Tavistock Square,

London WC1H 9JP

Telephone: +44 207 383 6069

Fax: +44 207 383 6644

Email: liaison@cma.bma.org.uk

Website: www.commonwealthmedics.org

The Liaison Officer could be reached in the office on Tuesdays and Fridays between 09.00- 14.00 Hours UK time.

Recruitment of a Liaison Officer

The Council decided to recruit a Liaison Officer to run the London office due to the nature and location of its member's activities. Ms Rita Afriyie, who met the requisite requirements, was offered the position as a Liaison Officer for the Secretariat. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Development Management from the University of

Westminster. She has worked with various development sectors in Africa especially Ghana, where she was an Executive Assistant at the Ghana AIDS Commission.

Meetings

An Executive team comprising of the President and Secretary and supported by Past President, Dr Krishnan, held separate meetings with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation as well as the leadership of the BMA International Department between 17-18 March 2008 on areas of collaboration and assistance towards CMA's strategic roles within the Commonwealth.

The Association was regularly represented at all civil society meetings organized by the Commonwealth secretariat in London. The President, and Secretary attended some of the meetings while Ms Rita Afriyie (Liaison Officer), represented the Association at all of the meetings.

In May 2008, the President and Secretary represented the CMA at the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) and the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH) meetings both of which took place in Geneva. Summarised reports on the meetings are provided below.

While in Geneva the President and Secretary also attended the 60th Anniversary World Health Assembly of the World Health Organisation.

Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting

The 2008 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) was held on May 18 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Commonwealth Foundation brought together Health Ministers and key representatives of the Pan-Commonwealth Civil Society Network on E-Health. The meeting was held under the theme "E-Health: Challenges and Opportunities". Presentations and documents presented at the meeting were on such important topics as;

- E-Health for Developing Countries: Affordable Strategies
- Global E-Health Developments: Fiscal, Legal, Infrastructural and Ethical Challenges
- E-Health: The Human Resource Challenges
- A Survey of E-Health Initiatives across the Commonwealth
- E-Health in the Commonwealth: Private Sector Perspectives.

The initiative provided a valuable forum where ministers and civil society representatives exchanged views, experiences and strategies regarding E-Health. A special focus was devoted in particular to the challenges facing the core functions of the health systems in developing countries in the face of mainstreaming information technology knowledge as a potential to radically change the way health systems are organised to improve the quality of services.

The purpose of the meeting was to create a greater focus, among health ministers, on this critical issue affecting the Commonwealth particularly in view of the significant advances made by developed and some developing countries in the use of ICT in their healthcare delivery services. The meeting appealed for assistance for developing Commonwealth countries with little resources and constrained national budgets in the supply of computers and development of software.

Health ministers later engaged at length with CSOs in an interactive question and answer session. Several ministers called upon the Foundation to assist in organising similar events in their respective countries.

Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH) Meeting

The President and the Secretary jointly took part in the CACH meeting during the CHMM. CACH members met to look at options for strengthening the focus of the Commonwealth Secretariat Health Section's programme of work, based on a recent review of its focus and operational modalities. Among the challenges noted by the CACH were the diverse needs of Commonwealth member countries, the limited resources of the Health Section's work programme, the rapidly changing global architecture and the need for the Secretariat to operationalise its broad health mandates.

The CACH recommended that: the Secretariat considers increasing the health budget to cover an expansion of the programme of work; or in the absence of an increase, re-focus and reduce the scale and scope of its programmes. The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH) set the agenda for the CHMM and recommended '*Climate Change and Health*' as the theme for 2009. The theme was chosen because it is a cross-cutting topic and also a focus of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Additionally, small-island states, which make up a large number of Commonwealth member countries, have become increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The CACH also noted

that emerging climate-change concerns were not only related to macro-environmental aspects, but are also linked to health and human security, including nutrition and shelter.

It is expected that the discussions at the CHMM in May this year will be packaged for deliberations by Civil Society Consultation and make an input into the agenda of CHOGM to be held in Trinidad and Tobago in December this year.

President Attends BMA Meeting In Edinburgh

The Annual Representative Meeting (ARM) is the BMA's key policy making meeting and the 2008 meeting was held in Edinburgh from July 7 to 10. The CMA President honoured the invitation of the BMA. While there Dr Arulraj took the opportunity to discuss with the office bearers of the NMAs of Canada, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Australia who were present and urged them to rejoin the CMA. Sri Lanka has since rejoined.

Commonwealth Accreditation

For many years, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation have had very close working relations with many civil society organisations. These civil society organisations have been granted accreditation and recognised as valuable NGOs of network sharing expertise, information and experience among organisations, the people-to-people links and the existence of a wider Commonwealth civil society. The ComSec and CF developed fresh criteria to re-assess all NGOs for re-accreditation to the Commonwealth to ensure better management of these organisations. The criteria were

- Commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental values
- Representing the true diversity of Commonwealth countries
- Transparent in their activities, guided by a constitution and clear financial accountability.

It is pleasing to report that extensive documentation to renew this formal recognition had been undertaken and CMA had regained its recognition. The Association was granted the Commonwealth re-accreditation in January 2008.

CMA is also affiliated to the World Health Organization.

Companies House Registration

Companies House of the UK is a registry of corporate information. The Registry carries out basic checks to make sure that relevant companies documents and financial reports have been fully completed and filed before they can be registered. The CMA has duly filed all the necessary documents and is now a registered NGO on the Company's house records as required by UK law for NGOs.

Financial Management

Subscription Fees

The current subscription position is still significantly low as a number of NMAs have outstanding fees to pay. The financial situation of the CMA is a huge challenge as the current subscription rates for NMAs are inadequate. In 2006 the subscription rates were reviewed and new indicators developed based on Country GDP, membership size of NMA and a capping system to prevent massive and frequent changes.

All NMAs are encouraged to pay up their annual subscription in accordance with the subscription demand notices issued.

Audited Accounts

The CMA accounts which were in arrears on assumption of the current Executive have been updated and audited. The audited accounts have since been filed with the Companies House of UK. At the 21st Triennial meeting in India the Council voted to retain the Auditing firm, Mark J. Rees, and it is important to commend the great role they played in updating and auditing the CMA accounts to meet the deadline of October 31 last year.

The Executive is in the process of compiling and completing the 2008 accounts for auditing.

Resignation of the Treasurer

Dr Myra Tilney who was elected as the Treasurer for the Association, resigned in March 2008. The position became vacant for a period and in November 2008 the Executive at its meeting at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia unanimously endorsed the nomination of Dr Margaret Mungherera (Vice-President for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa region) to serve as the Treasurer to complete the term of the Executive as constitutionally mandated.

CommonHealth Newsletter

The maiden edition of the CommonHealth newsletter was published in November 2008. CommonHealth is the official newsletter of the Commonwealth Medical Association which has undergone a “rebirth” as an e-Newsletter after some years of being out of circulation. The Newsletter is meant to disseminate information on the activities of the CMA and the component NMAs to member-Associations in particular and the global society.

All NMAs are encouraged to file relevant news and notices on their activities for publication to increase publicity and enhance information sharing. National Medical Associations are advised to contact the CMA secretariat for further information.

Website

The CMA website is still under development to bring it to the acceptable standard. When completed it is envisaged that NMAs will have a site to post their news items and also seek information on topical issues.

The address is www.commonwealthmedics.org

E-Health Commonwealth Asia Conference, November 11-14, 2008, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The CMA in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Malaysia, Commonwealth Foundation, Malaysian Medical Association, Indian Association of Medical Informatics, Malaysian Health Informatics Association and Open Source Healthcare Alliance organized the e-health Asia 2008 Conference from 11-15th November 2008 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The Commonwealth Medical Association led a panel discussed with the theme 'Global Experiences in e-Health Implementation & Practices' and also made some interesting presentations from the various regions of the Association. The session was co-chaired by Dr. S. Arulraj, President of the Commonwealth Medical Association and Dr. M. Abbas, President of the India Medical Association. The panelists comprised of Dr. Oheneba Owusu-Danso (Ghana), Secretary of CMA; Dr. N. Arumugam (Malaysia), Vice-President for South East region; and Dr. Jean Paul Tabone (Malta), Vice-President for European region. With experience sharing on e-Health initiatives from such diverse geographical areas across the world, the session was highly informative and enlightening. Other technical sessions discussed issues on "Understanding eHealth – Policy, Technology, Strategy", 'Technology Solutions & Best Practices for ICT driven Healthcare'. The common theme of all these presentations was clearly urging towards the technological and functional means for adopting networked healthcare delivery systems for effective, easy and speedy access to information to improve on services for clients.

Commonwealth Asia Symposium on Migration of Health Workers,

November 16-18, 2008 New Delhi

The symposium was organized by the Commonwealth Foundation in partnership with the Commonwealth Medical Association and was held from November 16-18, 2008 at the Hotel Atrium, Suraj Kund, NCR – New Delhi. Commonwealth health professional associations for medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, mental health, the handicapped and developmental disabilities were represented by member associations from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia. Representatives from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India, World Health Organization, Indira Gandhi National Open University of India, Centre for Trade & Development, India were among other participants. The Commonwealth Medical Association was represented by the President Dr S Arulraj and Dr Oheneba Owusu-Danso, secretary. The symposium discussed issues relating to migration of health workers in the commonwealth countries, its impact on the health care systems of the source and destination countries and to make relevant recommendations to address the challenges and problems due to such migration.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Medical Association Dr Oheneba Owusu-Danso made a presentation on the role of National Medical Associations in assisting their governments with the appropriate proposals and interventions to stem the tide of undue and negative workforce migration. Other presentations included the following main topics.

- Migration patterns and the resulting health workforce crisis
- Regional factors in health worker migration
- Unethical recruitment
- Successful retention strategy options
- The Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers and issues with the codes
- Fair recruitment practices

It became evident from the presentations and subsequent discussions that migration of doctors and nurses has become a major concern for many countries including some developed countries and different countries are adopting different retention strategies to stem the tide. There were also small group discussions on the following topics.

- Role of Commonwealth Health Professional Associations in implementing the Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers
- Role of organizations in (a) protecting health worker migrants (b) protecting health systems in source countries (c) regulating private recruitment firms
- Appropriate retention strategies
- Role of Commonwealth Health Professional Associations in encouraging better retention strategies

The following recommendations were adopted at the end of the symposium.

That, the Commonwealth Health Professional Associations;

1. Take an active role in disseminating the Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers and in the development of the WHO Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel.

2. Form an alliance of Commonwealth Health Professional Associations in order to have a strong and united voice at Commonwealth Secretariat level on issues of mutual interest and concern.
3. Take a supportive role in providing appropriate information to their members who may be considering migration around the migration process so they are in a better position to make an informed decision and take responsibility for the commitments made and the decision taken.
4. Urge governments through CHOGM to cooperate with and engage with the health professional associations of their countries in addressing the challenges posed by the migration of health professionals.

The Symposium further recommended to the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat that:

1. Research is commissioned to collect and collate data on the extent of health professional migration in Commonwealth countries and include research on the experience of and outcomes for health professionals who have migrated and the impact on health outcomes for the affected countries.
2. Research is commissioned across the Commonwealth targeted toward health professionals currently in health systems; health professionals who have left health systems (public to private, changed for non-health jobs); and migrant health professionals; to provide evidence for the development of effective retention strategies to inform best practice.

22nd Triennial Meeting

It is announced that the 22nd triennial meeting of the CMA will take place in Malta in November 2010. All NMAs are encouraged to factor the schedule in their future programmes and endeavour to attend. Details of the Council meeting and the concurrent scientific conference will be announced in due course.

Conclusion

The CMA has made remarkable improvement in its strategic planning, as well as civil society engagements over the period under review. National Medical

Associations receiving this report are welcomed to send comments and also make proposals to the Executive where necessary.