A Tribute to Professor Kwaku Ohene-Frempong
By the Ghana Physicians and Surgeons Foundation of North America (GPSF)

Members of the Ghana Physicians and Surgeons Foundation of North America (GPSF) were saddened to learn of Professor Ohene-Frempong’s illness from his beautiful and strong wife Janet. We could not bear the thought that this giant of a person would have to endure so much pain. His subsequent passing resurrected stories of kindness that match the immense contribution he made to the field of science and medicine.

There is a time to be born and a time to die. Between these two distinct life events, a person’s choices determine the legacy he (or she) leaves behind; what he (or she) did with the power and influence he (or she) attained. Professor Ohene-Frempong’s legacy demonstrates compassion and impact. His quest to transform healthcare delivery began in the womb with a small mutation embedded in his DNA, woven into his conscience by life events, and lived out in an overwhelming fragrance of charity. The sickle cell disease trait he carried would direct the course of his adult life and drastically transform the lives of millions around the world.

Professor Ohene-Frempong initiated and expanded neonatal screening for sickle cell disease when his son was the first in the world, diagnosed with the condition as a newborn, using a newly developed test. The advantages of early detection prompted Prof. Ohene-Frempong to help make this service readily available to other newborns. His passion for expanded screening services carved out an international reputation for him. Professor Ohene-Frempong’s name became synonymous with the early screening, treatment, and management of sickle cell disease.

Despite his busy schedule, Professor Ohene-Frempong’s concern for people went beyond his patients. Martin Luther King is often quoted as saying, “The true measure of a man is how he treats somebody who can do him absolutely no good. The measure of a man is what he does with power. If you want to see the true measure of a man, watch how he treats his inferiors, not his equals.” Professor Ohene-Frempong used his large sphere of influence in the science and medical field to open doors for others, allowing each to reach heights he or she would not have attained without his assistance. As I write this tribute on behalf of GPSF members, I am inundated with accounts of positive encounters with this great man.

Dr. Ebenezer Mante met Professor Ohene-Frempong as a student from the University of Ghana Medical School, undertaking a pediatric rotation at his United States institution in 1994. He taught Ebenezer pediatrics as he assessed Ebenezer’s potential. Years later, as a young doctor applying for residency in the United States, Professor Ohene-Frempong’s recommendation letter worked miracles. At one of Ebenezer’s selected institutions, Ebenezer received an offer immediately after the panel read Professor Ohene-Frempong’s letter. That was the extent of authority Professor Ohene-Frempong commanded.

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Professor Jonathan Laryea met him in the early 2000s at a conference in Washington DC, United States. Professor Ohene-Frempong overhead Jonathan discussing his dire need for accommodation in Philadelphia. Jonathan had a pending mandatory examination. Without hesitation, Professor Ohene-Frempong offered to take him home when he traveled to Philadelphia. Jonathan later discovered who this kind stranger was, a doctor with an international reputation. Upon arrival in Philadelphia, he picked Jonathan up from the Greyhound station, took him to dinner and made Jonathan welcome in his home. The next day, Professor Ohene-Frempong drove Jonathan to his examination, provided lunch afterwards, before dropping him off at the bus station. Professor Ohene-Frempong only briefly met Jonathan at the conference in DC, yet with his signature ready smile and kind heart, he and his wonderful wife Janet opened their home to Jonathan.

Dr. John Jeremiah Kretchy met Professor Ohene-Frempong in 2005 when he was one of the few medical officers selected to help the Professor with his pediatric sickle cell clinic at the 37 Military Hospital in Accra, Ghana. Upon learning that John wanted to pursue pediatrics, he arranged a six-month appointment at the prestigious Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. On John’s arrival at the hospital, the Professor used the power of a single telephone call to ensure John gained firsthand experience at every subspecialty section in Pediatrics. Professor Ohene-Frempong’s influence irrevocably and positively impacted John’s life.

There are many such stories of compassion, kindness, gentleness, determination, and passion that would fill volumes of books if we were to delve into each one. To Professor Ohene-Frempong, everyone was special and deserved his full attention. After years of knowing him, the last time I interacted with him was in February 2022 when Dr. Denise Asafo-Adjei, a GPSF member sought speakers for the Global Conference of Sickle Cell Disease Organizations. Professor Ohene-Frempong was kind enough to return my initial unanswered telephone call where he provided me with a history of the conference and his level of involvement, adding an open invitation to Denise to contact him. Somehow, I sensed the need to let him know I valued his friendship. Little did I know he was ill at the time.

Though dismayed by his death, we are grateful for his life’s work and the opportunity to interact with him. We remember the smile that danced on his kind face, his gentle mannerisms, and generous acts of kindness. Professor Ohene-Frempong was a founding member of GPSF, professionals who partner with colleagues in Ghana to impact Ghana’s healthcare system and the health of Ghanaians home and abroad. After the group’s founding, he remained an active friend of the organization and mentor to its members. He frequently used his influence to make professional connections that doctors needed.

Professor Ohene-Frempong’s impact in the medical community is unparalleled. His innovative ways to provide medication at no cost and establish sickle cell disease clinics around the world, and his commitment to patients with sickle cell disease continue to inspire us.
We will miss him dearly!

We pray for peace, comfort and strength for his wife Janet, daughter Afia, and the rest of his family.

Dr. Bertha Serwa Ayi
President
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