

A Look at 8th Commencement of Orotta School of Medicine and Dentistry



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Our nation's policy of education for all has been successful in reducing illiteracy. Moreover, the numerous achievements within the education sector have positively impacted all aspects of our society.

Human resource development in the healthcare sector has helped improve Eritrea's healthcare system and allow it to reach new levels. One of our nation's goals is to ensure access to healthcare and an improved standard of living for all. Moreover, access to healthcare is a basic human right. In order to achieve these goals and help protect this important right, the Ministry of Health has heavily invested in educating and training medical and dental experts.

The opening of Orotta School of Medicine in 2004 and School of Dentistry in 2007 helped to alleviate the deficit of healthcare professionals in the country and improved the delivery of healthcare services. Through their medical expertise, healthcare professionals have played a vital role in improving people's lives and allowing our country to achieve some of its strategic goals. The Orotta School of Medicine and Dentistry (OSMD) held its 8th graduation ceremony Saturday, 12th January. The occasion is a reflection of the significant progress that has been achieved in human resource development.

Most of the development initiatives that are carried out in Eritrea are needs driven. Our nation's great need for healthcare professionals in various areas was the main reason for the establishment of the OSMD. Notably, the growing number of graduates from the institution has helped to narrow gaps in the delivery of healthcare.

In addition to the establishment of various infrastructures, such as healthcare facilities, and the provision of medical equipment, the Eritrean

Government invested in developing institutions of higher education to ensure that service providing institutions, such as health facilities, would be staffed by well-trained professionals. Students trained in the OSMD are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and practical experience necessary to ensure high-quality services for the Eritrean people.

Providing quality medical education has been one of the main aims of the OSMD. In addition, great care is taken to ensure applicability with local context. So as to better fulfill these aims, the curriculum has often been revised and updated. For example, the length of study was lowered from eight to six years. As well, in order to assess and assure the competence of medical students, performance evaluation programs have been introduced. These are conducted through close collaboration of external examiners from medical schools abroad. Importantly, this helps ensure that Eritrean medical students receive high-quality training and obtain accreditation from international examiners.

Since its opening in 2004, the School of Medicine and Dentistry has graduated a total of 285 medical doctors and 35 dental doctors. In the 7th commencement, there were 247 medical graduates (51 of whom were females) and 22 dental graduates (with 7 females). Importantly, the increased number of medical professionals has dramatically improved the physician-patient ratio in the country. According to a report from the Ministry of Health (MOH), the physician-patient ratio in 1991 was 1 to 37,500. By 2018, this improved to 1 to 16,279. Such an improvement is a reflection of the importance of the OSMD and the great efforts of its staff, students, and graduates.

It is important to note that medical and dental students are provided practical training opportunities at all medical institutions of the MOH. This allows them to strengthen their skills and gain vital experience.

According to Yemane Seyoum, Associate Professor and Dean of the OSMD, the graduates who wrote the international examinations, which are a prerequisite for enrolment in post-graduate study, have had extraordinary results. Of note, during the 2017/18 academic year, the OSMD sent 13 graduates abroad to pursue their post-graduate studies in various fields of medicine.

Over the years, healthcare education has been offered in various schools. However, as per the directive of the National Higher Education and Research Institute, which was undertaken at the beginning of the 2018/19 academic year, the OSMD was merged with the Asmara College of Health Sciences. The new institution is now officially named as the Orotta College of Medicine and Health Sciences (OCMHS).

The OCMHS has 7 departments and 22 programs. There are approximately 1,250 students enrolled. Prof. Yemane disclosed that one of

the factors that led to the merging of the colleges was the advantage that merging offers in terms of sharing resources. He also declared that the OCMHS will strive to demonstrate excellence in medicine and health sciences through providing high-quality education and research.

During this year's commencement, a total of 56 students graduated; 43 are from the 2016/2017 Class of Medicine, while 13 are from the 2015 Dental Class.

Milkyas Feseha, a student in dental medicine, graduated with "great distinction." He demonstrated many qualities during his academic career. After the ceremony, he said that he is ready to make a positive difference in his community in collaboration with the past and current graduates. "We will exert our greatest efforts to ensure high-quality services," he declared.

Human resource development in the healthcare sector is vital in order to ensure Eritrea's sustainable development. Prof. Yemane reiterated that the OCMHS is preparing students to successfully take on the challenges that they will face after they graduate. He also went on to remind graduates that serving patients is the fundamental part of their profession and that the graduates should work hard to serve their communities.