The Mampong Centre
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The Mampong Centre

... A marriage of herbal and orthodox medicine

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ON the Akwapim ridge, precisely at Mampong, lies a treasure trove, whose contents are as old as the ages and have breathed life into all species of humankind.

The Centre for Scientific Research into Plant Medicine, as the name implies has over the past 32 years been involved in providing a scientific basis to nature's clinic-herbs and concoctions whose therapy and custodians pre-date Hippocrates, the Greek patriarch of modern medicine.

What actually jolted the founder of the Centre, Dr. Oku Ampofo an Edinburgh trained medical officer, to dare where others had scorned, was frustration.

After returning from his medical training in Glasgow, Scotland in 1948, the Colonial Administration refused to employ him in one of the government hospitals, out of sheer discrimination.

Undaunted, Dr. Ampofo set up a clinic at Mampong Akwapim, that served the whole of the Akwapim ridge and relied on the preparations of some renowned herbalists to successfully treat patients.

Thus, the resilience determination and unbridled faith of one man, is what led to the establishment of the centre, which has come to represent hope for many.

Today, as opposed to the immediate post-Edinburgh years of Dr. Ampofo, orthodox medicine has made giant strides that should logically erode faith in the power of herbal medicine. The story is different.

About 65 percent of the country's population, especially rural folk, are dependent on herbal medicine, says Professor Laud K.N.A. Okine, Director of the Centre.

He told the Spectator that people were now opting for natural products, which include herbal medicines, as is the case in China and India thereby making misconceptions about herbal medicines, a thing of the past. Herbal medicine is and "no more a taboo".

Dr. Okine issue is that full potential of the centre is yet to be unleashed and "I can say that the future of the herbal industry in the country is bright. I see a big light at the end, especially when Ghanaians are beginning to believe that herbal medicine works".
Prof. Okine's assertion is not merely conjectural. It is borne out by deed.

The centre has over the years developed plant medicines, which have brought relief to men with low sperm count, bad eyesight, aches, malaria, as well as managing hypertension and diabetes. The list goes on.

Prof. Okine added that the centre in collaboration with a herbal medicine manufacturer is in the process of developing a product to deal with HIV/AIDS.

He said the safely tests of the product have been successful, but added that it will take some few years to complete the investigations.

The development of antidotes to tuberculosis, prostrate and breast cancer patients, he said, were far advance.

"In the case of prostrate cancer, the centre is investigating a product which helps men suffering from urine retention. Safety tests and standardization of the product have been completed leaving clinical trials to nail down the compound responsible for the disease", he said.

Prof. Okine enumerated inadequate funding and inputs, competition from other herbal medicine manufacturers and the centre's zeal to venture into mass production of herbal drugs in the face of inadequate equipment as some of the problems facing the centre.

He also said the attraction of high caliber skilled personnel was a major challenge because of the centre location and relatively low remuneration. However, with the rehabilitation of the Accra-Mampong road he was of the view that other incentives put in place by the management of the centre will attract and retain the staff it requires currently, he said, the centre boasts of a staff strength of 23, which consists of biochemists, pharmacologists, microbiologists, phythachemists and medical doctors.

Touching on the relationship between the CSRPM and other herbal practitioners in the country, Prof. Okine said they enjoyed a very healthy and mutually beneficial relationship.

He said it will be very useful for the country, to collaborate with and encourage links between the practitioners of herbal and orthodox medicine.

He, however, advised herbalists to ensure that all their claims were evidence-based "in order to convince a medical person about the reliability of their products".

Prof. Okine advocated the setting aside of a tract of land to cultivate herbal plantations that will feed the industry.

"There is so much potential for large scale development of herbal medicine. It could save us millions of foreign exchange we spend on the importation of certain drugs, and could also bring us same, if we harness the potential effectively", he said.
On the way forward, he said he had established collaborative links with the University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the University of Aberdeen, the World Health Organisations in and outside Ghana to harness the maximum potential for plant medicine.

*Source:
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