



WEST AFRICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

*44<sup>th</sup>/45<sup>th</sup> Annual General & Scientific Meeting*

*Held virtually 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2021*

## COMMUNIQUE

### PREAMBLE

- The 44th & 45th Annual General and Scientific Meeting of the West African College of Physicians, hosted by The Gambia chapter, was held virtually, from 1st-3rd November, using Kenes Group platform
- The Minister of Health of The Gambia, **Dr Ahmadou Lamin Samateh**, the Director of Africa CDC, **Dr John Nkengasong** delivered their speeches at the opening ceremony
- Sister Colleges delivered their goodwill messages
- **His Excellency Adama Barrow The President of The Gambia** officially launched the meeting on Monday 1st November 2021
- The Theme of the Conference: « Universal Health Coverage was: **“a right for everyone, everywhere”** and the scientific tracks were: Universal healthcare, Age-related healthcare, Vaccines, Mental health, Epidemic and pandemic healthcare
- **1,447 delegates across 5 continents from 24 countries:** Australia, Belgium, Benin, Burkina Faso, Canada, Congo (Brazzaville), Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, France, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, United Kingdom and The United States of America.
- The academic activities of the meeting included the following
  - **The Mabayoje College Lecture**, titled « Attaining SDG3 Maternal, Newborn and child Health related targets in West Africa: Challenges of inequities and inequalities - **Professor Angela Okolo** on behalf of the Faculty of Paediatrics
  - **The Annual College Symposium** featuring: « Universal Health Care: Beyond the Slogan » was presented by Faculty of Family Medicine. Topics covered included: Universal health Coverage (UHC) in the post-COVID-19 era, Improving health indices through strengthening primary care, Challenges and prospects of accessibility to essential health services.
  - **A Vaccinology Symposium** - New Developments in Vaccinology in West Africa with the following topics: Vaccine science at MRC Gambia and with West-African Partnerships, New vaccines against meningitis and pneumonia in West Africa, Vaccinating pregnant women to protect their babies- example of RSV, Vaccine Confidence in West Africa – do we need to be concerned, and gaps in Vaccine coverage in West Africa



- **A Mental Health Symposium** - Mental Health Awareness and Combating Stigma with the following topics: Mental Health of children and adolescents, Mental health policy and practice in the sub-region, The person behind the white coat: work and mental health among doctors in the sub-region, Grandmothers treating depression: lessons from the Friendship Bench Zimbabwe; and Mental Health Advocacy in Nigeria: a case study on how the lessons from the past can change the future
  - **SARS-CoV-2 (COVID) Symposium:** Successes and Challenges – The Africa Experience with the following presentation : Clinical trials for SARS-CoV-2 vaccines on the African continent, Challenges and lessons from SARS-CoV-2, Development of SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen test and plans for vaccine production in Senegal, Seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 in Africa and immunity induced by natural infection, and Equity in vaccine access.
  - **A Special and very appreciated session for Young Fellows and Members** , that discussed on Life After Residency Training: Developing a Career in Clinical Research. The topics covered were : The need for clinician scientists in healthcare and research, Training and Mentorship for a Research Career, Attracting funding for research in West Africa, How West African Clinician-Scientists can Bridge the Research-to-Publication Gap.
- There were scientific sessions in which **105 presentations** (32 oral and 73 posters) relevant to the theme and subthemes were made. In addition, there were 20 symposium presentations and four (4) targeted to Members and young Fellows of the College.
  - **430 new fellows and 449 new members** in the medical specialties of Community Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Laboratory Medicine, Paediatrics & Psychiatry were inducted at the ceremony opening.
  - 07 new members and 04 new Fellows were also inducted at the closing ceremony

### **OBSERVATIONS**

- Almost all the West African countries are far from attaining the SDG3 which is mainly related to UHC, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines, and vaccines for all.
- Maternal and under-five mortality ratios in West African countries remain high with as root causes: poverty, inequities in health and avoidable health inequalities, underutilization of health services, low coverage of share of births attended (SBA) skilled staff, weak reference and feedback system, limited funding for health in the sub-region
- There is abysmal level of health coverage of West African citizens with a double burden of disease, poor access to care and poor health outcomes, many years after the launch of Social Health Insurance Scheme in the sub-region
- There is an imbalance in health investments at different levels of the health system: more financing to tertiary level while almost 80% of the healthcare workload is managed at PHC level



- COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the delivery of essential healthcare services, worsened by existing health inequities, fragile healthcare systems, persistent supply issues (98% of medicines, vaccines and other healthcare commodities in Africa are imported)
- Vaccine confidence seems low in the region with high vaccine hesitancy for participating to vaccine trials in the context of misinformation widespread through social media
- There is a gap in vaccine coverage in the region towards the immunisation 2030 agenda with differences across countries, equity gaps (urban vs rural, maternal education, wealth difference)
- There is lack of scientific data generated on the African continent and this has been again highlighted by the current pandemic, mainly of because lack of committed leadership and adequate funding
- There is a poor governance structure for mental health in West Africa as shown by lack of mental health policy and strategic plans in most of West Africa countries.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations to Governments and other stakeholders

- Governments should invest in quality primary care as it is the cornerstone to achieving Universal Health Coverage
- Governments should strengthen primary care at the level of the primary care provider by providing adequate training and capacity building, and redesigning the health system to make it patient & family-centred, community -oriented and team-based with multisectorial collaboration (public-private, alternate medicine), and monitoring and evaluation
- Governments should strengthen physician-led PHC/Health system and improve the Human Resources in Health Development plans
- Governments and other stakeholders should promote research in Health in sub-region by building capacity and providing adequate resources
- Governments should build capacity and infrastructures for local manufacturing of essential medicines and vaccines in Africa.
- Governments and other stakeholders should continue to raise awareness about the current COVID-19 pandemic and the need for all to get vaccinated
- Governments should improve political will and prioritise mental health, as there is no health without mental health as preached by the UN/WHO



## Recommendations to College

- The College should encourage, in their advisory capacity, WAHO and the Governments of West Africa to:
  - accelerate attainment of SDG 3 through ensuring adherence to Abuja declaration for increase in health budget to the level of 15% of national budget.
  - tackle poverty elimination and address gender equity in communities of West Africa.
  - strengthen the health system and in particular, the primary health care system and the community sub systems.
- The College should explore further means of collaboration with Governments to support work force development and health coverage for hard-to-reach communities through capacity building and collaboration with country governments towards increasing the number of specialists to address the needs.
- The College should advocate consistently governments at all levels as well as the informal sector to engage in Universal Health Coverage
- The College through chapters and faculties should intensify communication towards populations to overcome vaccine hesitancy.

## RESOLUTIONS

**That the West African College of Physicians is committed to :**

- 1. Assisting the governments of the Sub-region to accelerate attainment of SDG 3 through Universal Health Coverage across the subregion**
- 2. Providing the expertise of its members to governments to put in place a resilient and quality primary care health system**
- 3. Assisting the governments in building strong research capacities across the sub-region**
- 4. Assisting the governments of the sub-region to build capacity for local manufacturing of essential medicines and vaccines in the sub-region**
- 5. Partnering with organizations such as WAHO and countries to develop and implement mental health policies and strategies for qualitative mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and interventions in the sub region**