

# Contribution of Dr Andrew Pearson to the Development of Family Medicine in Nigeria.

Obazee, Matie E.

Echos Hospital Ltd, Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria  
[ehimatie.obazee@npmcn.edu.ng](mailto:ehimatie.obazee@npmcn.edu.ng)



## DR ANDREW PEARSON

Contribution to the Development  
Of Family Medicine In Nigeria.

### SUMMARY

Dr Charles Andrew Pearson was born in Shaoyang, Hunan, China, in 1921 to a British Methodist missionary general practitioner. His choice to pursue a lifelong career as a missionary doctor in China had to change because of the prevailing circumstances there at that time. He was redeployed to serve as the Medical Superintendent of Wesley Guild Hospital in Ilesha, Nigeria, by the British Methodist Society in 1952. He worked meritoriously at Ilesha for 23 years.

He accepted the appointment as the Chief Medical Officer of the University of Ibadan Medical School Ibarapa project in Igbo-ora 1975. While there, he worked assiduously along with the Dean, Prof B. O. Osuntokun, for the commencement of training in General Practice at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In collaboration with other stakeholders, the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria, NPMCN, successfully started a postgraduate training programme in General Practice in 1980, followed subsequently by the West Africa Postgraduate Medical College.

He was appointed the first Director of Training of the GMP Faculty of NPMCN. He served in this capacity passionately, laying a solid foundation for the high-quality training programme that the Faculties of Family Medicine is known for in Nigeria/West Africa today.

### BACKGROUND

In telling the story of the contributions of Dr C. A. Pearson to the development of General Medical Practice, GMP (now Family Medicine) in Nigeria, it is pertinent to give a brief personal background of Dr Pearson. Dr Andrew Pearson was born in Shaoyang, Hunan, China, on the 10th of December, 1921. He chose a lifelong career as a Methodist medical missionary to China. He, therefore, returned there after his medical training in Liverpool in 1946 to work alongside his father, who ran a hospital as a G.P. As destiny will have it, the circumstances surrounding the cultural revolution at that time were not conducive for him and his wife Jean to raise their children. He, therefore moved reluctantly back to England in 1951.

### COMMENCEMENT OF WORK IN NIGERIA.

He was redeployed by the Methodist Missionary Society of Britain to Nigeria. He assumed office 1952 as the Medical Superintendent of the Wesley Guild

Hospital, a Methodist Foundation at Ilesha in Western Nigeria. He worked there for 23 years, during which time he supervised major building projects and built an enviable quality team of respected Nigerians and expatriates, including Dr David Morley, who pioneered a revolution of child health care through the renowned under-5 weight monitoring programs. It was at Ilesha the first-ever measles vaccine was tested. Dr Pearson made sure his four children were among those given the vaccine.

While there, he exposed medical students from the University of Ibadan, who came there for community medicine exposure, to the tenets of medical practice as a general practitioner. One of the students was the late Prof. B.O Osuntokun, the world-renowned neurologist who later became the Dean of the University of Ibadan Medical School.

Amidst the coups and countercoups that occurred in

Nigeria after the Biafran war, support for the hospital diminished. In 1975, the government took over the hospital and made it a part of the University of Ife Teaching Hospital Complex, now Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex (OAUTH).

In the words of Professor R.O.A Makanjuola, the CMD of the Teaching Hospital 20 years later, "At the time of government takeover, Dr. and Mrs. Pearson, and some other dedicated health workers - missionaries and Nigerians alike, were treated disgracefully." While contemplating what to do, he was invited to the University of Ibadan by Prof. Osuntokun, who was then the Dean of the Medical School. After 23 years of service at Ilesha, he accepted his appointment as Chief Medical Officer of the University of Ibadan Community Health Program in Igbo-ora, Ibarapa Local Government Area. His mandate was "to direct medical students towards a generalist vocation under our community training scheme in Ibarapa". He assumed duty on 14 October 1975.

He swung immediately to action with his first tentative paper on "General Practice Training", which he distributed among friends in the Faculty of Medicine. Following the good response to it, he was encouraged by Prof. Osuntokun to write a fuller paper on "Doctors in Primary Medical Care", which set out the need for General Practice training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels - sketching out a possible curriculum and rotational postings for a postgraduate Fellowship. This was distributed widely to many key stakeholders. This was as far back as 1976. Among the respondents were Prof. T. O. Ogunlesi, Dr F. Salawu, Prof. O. Ransome-Kuti, Prof. M. A. Bankole, Dr T. A. Ogunmuyiwa, Dr. S. O. Oloruntoba, Dr. C. G. Okojie, Dr. David C. Morley and Prof. B. O. Osuntokun. The response from all of them was very positive.

This was followed by a series of activities and consultations within Nigeria and the UK by Dr Pearson and other key persons. As a result of these efforts, the Dean of Ibadan Medical School decided to include the proposed Department of General Practice in the 1980-85 Quinquennial Plan. In March 1978, the Faculty Board accepted the proposal to include General Practice in the undergraduate programme. However, no budgetary provision was made for it, so the proposal did not go up to the Senate. In July 1978, Professor Osuntokun completed his tenure as Dean. Nevertheless, Dr Pearson continued training medical students in community health and general practice in line with his mandate. His lecture series on "Faces of Medicine in General Practice" was passionately delivered as an advocacy for vocational training in general practice. Those lectures went a long way in

endearing several medical students who passed through the programme to take up a career in general medical practice; some of those students, including myself, were among the pioneers of the training programme when it eventually started in 1980.

He was an avid teacher. I recall that the first time I clearly understood the surgical procedure of herniorrhaphy was when I assisted Dr Pearson in doing the operation at Comprehensive Health Centre, Eruwa, in Ibarapa. His approachable and friendly nature also endeared him to many students and Resident doctors. He hosted an "Open House" program on Sundays, during which students and whoever cared were welcome to come and share a cup of tea and biscuits and sing hymns while his wife, Jean, mounted the piano. This disposition went a long way in making anyone he encountered grant him a listening ear - a skill he utilised to win many of us to take up a career in a speciality that did not yet exist.

#### **THE BIRTH OF THE FACULTY OF GMP IN THE NATIONAL POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL COLLEGE OF NIGERIA, NPMCN**

While Dr Pearson was working assiduously for the commencement of training in General Practice both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, unknown to him, the resuscitated Association of General and Private Medical Practitioners of Nigeria, AGPMPN, were also making efforts through the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria, MDCN for vocational postgraduate training. They got the support of MDCN in their quest. They were informed that there was an ongoing process to set up a medical postgraduate College to train specialists in different specialities. General Practice was one of the 14 Faculties envisaged.

They were directed to:

- (a) Set up a 16-member GMP Faculty Board
  - (b) Elect a Chairman, Secretary and Third Member to represent the Faculty in the Governing Board and Senate of the proposed Postgraduate College.
- © Prepare a syllabus, vocational training scheme and examination format for the Fellowship program in GMP.

While they were working on this assignment, unknown to them, Dr Pearson was pursuing the same goal with the support of the Dean and several other medical academics, notably at the University of Ibadan. Meanwhile, Dr Pearson visited the RCGP during his leave in August 1977 to solicit their assistance. He also visited the Department of GP in Medical schools in Manchester, Birmingham, and Nottingham. He got support from the then College

President, Prof. P. S. Byrne.

In pursuing the assignment, the AGMPN decided at some point to consult the Royal College of General Practitioners, RCGP, of the UK for guidance in executing the task. In addition to offering them documents that could assist them, they were informed that a certain Dr Andrew Pearson, based in Wesley Guild Hospital, Ilesha, Nigeria, had recently made a similar enquiry from the RCGP. They were advised to contact the doctor and work together to set up the proposed GMP Faculty in the Postgraduate College. They did so and subsequently got Dr Pearson into the newly formed Faculty Board as a Member, Special Adviser and Faculty Director of Training.

### **DRAWING UP THE GMP FELLOWSHIP CURRICULUM**

In close collaboration with Dr Pearson, the Faculty Board members drew up the syllabus for the Primary, Part 1 and Part 2 of the proposed programme, bearing in mind what type of front-line doctor/general practitioner was appropriate for a developing country like Nigeria.

### **WEST AFRICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, WACP**

In June 1979, Dr Olusegun Ajayi, Secretary of AGPMPN at the time, sent a copy of the proposed curriculum for the FMCGP to Professor P.O. Fasan, Secretary of the WACP. In November 1979, it was arranged that the proposed Faculty of GMP be discussed at the AGM in Monrovia. Dr Pearson was requested to present the report of a committee recommending that the Faculty of GP be started using the Curriculum proposed for the NPMCN as a template.

### **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND LINK WITH THE FORD FOUNDATION**

Before presenting the curriculum to the Senate, the Faculty Board organised an international conference to get input from sister Colleges in the UK, Canada and Australia. This was mainly done with funding support from the Ford Foundation. The AGPMPN, the University of Ibadan, and the West Africa Postgraduate Medical College also gave various forms of support. Dr Pearson coordinated the programme at the University of Ibadan Conference Centre in 1980. The theme of the conference was "Training for General Practice". It was declared open by the then Executive Governor of Oyo state, late Chief Bola Ige. Also in attendance were, the Vice Chancellor University of Ibadan, Prof. Kayode Oyediran, the Provost of the University of Ibadan Medical School, Prof. Wole Akande and GPs from all over the country including doctors from missionary hospitals which were the potential training centres. Overseas consultants came in from Canada, Britain and Egypt.

Some young doctors and medical students, including my humble self, also participated in the Conference. The Conference was highly successful. The curriculum was, thereafter presented to the College for approval.

### **DIRECTOR OF TRAINING**

Dr Pearson was appointed the first Director of Training of the GMP Fellowship Programme. His duty was scouting for training centres and trainers, organising courses/workshops, and monitoring and coordinating the GMP Fellowship programme. A job he did creditably well, travelling around the country to inspect and accredit training centres and organise workshops. He took a personal interest in monitoring the progress of Resident doctors and promptly attended to their challenges.

### **BOOK PACKS FOR RESIDENT DOCTORS**

Through his assistance, pioneer resident doctors were given free book packs to address the shortage of relevant books. The fund for this was from part of the Ford Foundation grant.

### **THE GMP FACULTY NEWS SHEET. "THE FRONTLINE DOCTOR"**

The faculty established a News Sheet called "The Frontline Doctor" to keep the Faculty Fellows and Residents informed of all Faculty and College activities. Dr Pearson was the Editor of the News Sheet which was the first of its kind in the College and has since evolved into the current journal.

### **SERVICE IN RETIREMENT**

Even after retiring from the service of the Faculty in 1986 to return with his wife to their home in Bury-St Edmunds in Cambridgeshire, England, Dr Pearson continued to serve the Faculty by maintaining the Faculty's link with the Royal Colleges and on several occasions when the Faculty delegations visited the UK, he was an invaluable liaison between them and the various British Institutions visited.

### **LAST CONTACT**

Perhaps our last official contact with Dr Pearson was when I, as the Chairman of the International Conference for Curriculum Review, ICCR, invited him to participate in the Conference scheduled for October 1998. He initially expressed his reservations about our aspiration to change the name of the speciality from General Medical Practice to Family Medicine, a move which I spearheaded. Following my assurances that the change of name does not entail any attempt to diminish the content of the curriculum as it existed but to enrich it, he enthusiastically embraced it. He looked forward to attending the Conference. Sadly, he expressed his regret at his

inability to come to the Conference as he was then diagnosed with a terminal illness. He, however, encouraged Dr Scott Murray of the University of Edinburgh to attend and represent him.

### **AWARDS**

He was Knighted Order of the British Empire, OBE, in 1974. In appreciation of his invaluable contributions, his host community in Igbo-ora, Oyo State, Nigeria, honoured him with a Chieftaincy title. He was also honoured by the Ijesaland with another Chieftaincy title, 'Baasegun of Ijesaland and Imesi-Ile' for his outstanding contribution to the healthcare of the Ijesa people and Imesi-Ile community in Osun State. He died on the 7th of November 1997.

### **CONCLUSION**

The entire record of the contributions of Dr C. A. Pearson cannot be captured in an article of a few pages like this. The preceding has been highly abridged snippets of the works of a Methodist missionary doctor who stayed true to his life mission to assiduously work for the actualisation of what he believed was his calling. Dr C. A. Pearson was a clinician par excellence, an astute administrator, a great teacher, and a diplomat. He utilised all these attributes to contribute immensely to laying a solid foundation, which the Faculty of Family Medicine in Nigeria/West Africa is known for today.

He aptly deserves to be recognised as the Father of General Medical Practice Training in Nigeria.

He authored numerous papers on leprosy, tuberculosis, latrine construction and training. He wrote the history of Wesley Guild Hospital, Front-line Hospital (1996) and a textbook, Medical Administration for the Frontline Doctor (1990).

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