

Quality Medical Education for Securing the Health of the Society



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On 27 July, Orotta College of Medicine and Health Sciences held its 3rd commencement since its establishment in 2018 through the merging of Orotta School of Medicine and Asmara College of Health Sciences. The college consists of 11 academic departments composed of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. This article delves into the College's overall activities and contribution on producing qualified health professionals, but first, we need to shed some light on Eritrea's success in the health sector.

Eritrea as a developing nation has made impressive progress in assuring the wellbeing of its citizens. Over the past 30 years of independence, the Ministry of Health underwent remarkable progress towards access and distribution of health services around the entire country. Consequently, the health sector has undergone a major transformation within a relatively short time, attaining significant reduction in morbidity and mortality attributed to preventable diseases.

In line with Eritrea's longstanding commitment to equality, social justice, and leaving no one behind, health services are heavily subsidized, in patients are required to make only nominal payments. On top of that, a wide range of essential health services including all public and preventive services, like immunization

and growth monitoring, nutrition and supplementation, pre and post-partum care, and health education are free of charge. In addition, all patients with chronic diseases and other disorders, such as tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS, hypertension, diabetes, and mental disorders, among several others, are provided with free care and prescribed medications.

Alongside the above-mentioned progress, the expansion of health infrastructure, and human capacity development have also been areas of major focus over the past 3 decades. The Ministry made huge investments in constructing and renovating many hospitals, health stations, health centers, clinics, and waiting rooms including in very remote areas. According to data from the Ministry, there are nearly 350 health facilities distributed across the country (comprising hospitals, health centers, health stations, and clinics) – which signifies a 231% increase from 1991. More than 80% of the population lives within a 10km radius of a health facility and more than 70 percent within a 5 km radius, representing major improvements from just a few decades ago.



With all its internal resources and capacity the country has made exemplary progress. The country has allocated a lot of its domestic resources, of course with full participation and support of the community, to achieve a lot of success in different areas. Eritrea is on the verge of eliminating HIV/ AIDS, malaria, and, hopefully, TB soon. There's considerable commitment at the central, regional, and subzone levels to reach the strategic goals.

The Asmara College of Health Sciences was established in 1998 the Orotta School of Medicine was established in 2004 and in 2008 the School of Medicine started a new program of postgraduate specialization under the supervision of the Higher Board of Education and the Ministry of Health.

Human resource development policy in the health sector is the cornerstone among the priorities of the country, and the Orotta College of Medicine and Health Sciences (OCMHS) is determined to produce competent, compassionate, disciplined, and knowledgeable healthcare professionals.

The mission of OCMHS is to produce health professionals whose knowledge, professional skills, and practice in medical fields are in tune with society's needs, practice patterns, and scientific advancements. The college strives towards developing the highest standards of academic and clinical excellence, a learning environment conducive to pursuing professional competency of health workers, research, and service to the community. The Ministry of Health in partnership with the Board of Higher Education plays a significant role in guiding the college to produce human resources that meet the needs of the population and it underwent three major principles.

- Producing new health professionals by providing new infrastructures or renovating and expanding the existing ones and providing qualified lecturers.
- Providing further education abroad for specialization and for some special fields of study which cannot be given in the country or provide them distance education.
- The third principle is continuing education to health professionals; be as doctors, nurses, and technicians to upgrade their level of knowledge. This principle helped to promote all health workers to be scientifically and technologically equipped.

Since its founding, the Asmara College of Health Sciences has graduated 5,727 high and mid-level health professionals. Of these graduates, 2917 are from the degree program, while the remaining 2810 are from the diploma program. The Orotta School of Medicine and Dentistry also graduated 556 doctors including 83 doctors of dentistry and 473 doctors of general medicine.

Currently, the college is responsible for undertaking postgraduate clinical specialists training programs in seven clinical disciplines namely pediatrics and child health, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, internal medicine, radiology, diagnostic imaging, pathology, and ophthalmology.

The OCMHS, like any other higher learning institution, has a well-defined academic calendar, a structured curriculum of all departments and programs, a syllabus that also emphasizes the course structure, student evaluation methodology, and academic regulations. The college operates its functions through a defined College philosophy, mission, vision, goal, and learning objectives articulating graduates profile and impacts. The academic activities are carried out by a total of 96 faculty members, of these 75 are Eritreans.

Thanks to the government's commitment and the College's relentless effort, there has been a considerable increase in the number of health professionals. The number of nurses from 625 in 1997 to 1,474 in 2021; in the same course of time the number of assistant nurses raised from 1,220 to 2,918, dental therapists from 11 to 165, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians from 97 to 486, laboratory technicians from 99 to 517, radiologists from 28 to 132, physiotherapy technicians from 6 to 140, and specialized doctors from 5 to 74. Notably, the government covers the full costs of education, training, and salaries for all health workers.