

INTERAGENCY LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING
WELCOME ADDRESS BY HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH

MAJOR COURAGE QUASHIGAH (RTD)

ELIMINA BEACH RESORT ON 9TH APRIL 2008

Hon. Deputy Minister of Health

Partners from the Global Health Initiative

Heads of agencies

Directors of the Ministry of Health

Our partners from the private sector

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first Ghana Health Interagency Leadership Committee Meeting for the year 2008. This meeting is jointly organized by the Ministry of Health and the Global Health Initiative of the World Economic Forum. We are also grateful to our counterparts from the Global Health Initiative and all heads of agencies for agreeing to be part of this exciting process of team building in the health sector.

The purpose of this meeting and subsequent quarterly meetings are basically to improve

coordination within the health sector to ensure that the health system as a whole functions better. We are here to share ideas on how to enhance leadership and teamwork, strengthen collaboration and coordination and how together we can contribute towards the overall goals of the sector.

I am aware that over the years we have made attempts at leadership development and team building. But you will agree with me that the issues involved are not those that can be dealt with at one off meetings and seminars. We need, as leaders in the sector to continuously work together and support each other if we are to function as one organization with a common set of objectives.

Indeed there have been too many occasions where agencies pursue similar programmes without talking to each other. Agencies are known to develop and implement programmes without recourse to the sector programme of

work and some actually ignore agreed policies under the pretext of autonomy.

We cannot continue to dissipate energy and resources like that because at the end of the day it is our common goal that suffers.

Most of you here understand the human complex body more than I do, even though I have been reading a lot lately. But you all know how the body systems work together to make us function as human beings. While some organ is converting food to energy some are busy flushing out the residue and by-product products. When there is a shortfall in the performance of one organ others compensate by stepping up their performance and all these happen because every part of the body is necessarily part of a team.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me try to share a few ideas with you. In the army, an institution I know very well, we thrive on team work. The Air force cannot win a battle on its own. They complement

the Army by air bombardment to keep the enemy's head down to allow the infantry to close in on the enemy without resistance; so does the peri-operative nurse prepare a patient for operation by the surgeon.

The health sector is at war with the enemy called disease which must be attacked with all the forces possible available to us, the nurse, the doctor, the pharmacist, radiologists and laboratory technicians, the cleaner etc must all work as a team just like the human body. That is the type of team I intend to build in every health worker.

A team is a group of people coming together to collaborate. This collaboration is to reach a shared goal or task for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. A group of people is not necessarily a team. A team is a group of people with a high degree of interdependence geared towards the achievement of a common goal or completion of a

task. It is not just a group put together for administrative convenience.

Team members not only cooperate in all aspects of their tasks and goals, they share in what are traditionally thought of as management functions, such as planning, organizing, setting performance goals, assessing the team's performance, developing their own strategies to manage change, and securing their own resources.

Unfortunately, as one Douglas McGregor observed, most groups who call themselves teams are not teams at all. They are collections of individual relationships with the boss. Each individual vying with the others for power, prestige and position.

For us to achieve the targets we have set for ourselves it is important that as a sector we begin to see each and everyone as a member of the health team. It is only when we do this that we can out-perform all reasonable expectations

given to its individual agencies, directorates and individuals.

Over the next few months we will be bringing you together so that we can continuously work at creating the necessary environment for you to feel and behave as part of a team and to enable you to put the principles into action at the level of your agencies and directorates.

On the subject of leadership let me once again borrow from the army by quoting one General John Wickham. He said and I quote - *I think the Army would make a serious mistake if we made a distinction and said, "You are a manager, and you are a leader." So my philosophy is that we are all leaders! We also must be responsible managers or stewards of resources entrusted to us. We would make a serious mistake to think that we could be one and not the other.* End of quote.

You are gathered here today as the cream of leaders in the health sector. But some of you think of yourselves simply as managers or

supervisors. Thinking of yourself as a manager or supervisor places you in a position of traditional authority based solely on respect for the position, which places you in a position of power. You must think of yourselves rather as "team leaders." By understanding the personal work preferences and motivations of your team members, you as an individual, rather than your position, will earn their real respect and trust.

This means that the people under you are not simply followers who blindly go where you go, but rather are a group of people who are supportive of collaboration in order to achieve a common goal through mutual knowledge and skill sharing.

Leadership shows itself in the inspired action of team members. Traditionally, organizations have assessed leaders by their actions and behaviours. But, the best way to assess leadership is by the degree to which people surrounding leaders are inspired. It is this inspiration that leads organizations on to excellent performance.

As we begin to forge team spirit and build leadership capacity it is important for us to understand that we all share common elements through our National Health Policy and our Programmes of Work. These present the basic framework for achievement as a team. We therefore need to align ourselves and our interagency goals so that together we can create the needed synergy for meeting the targets we have set for ourselves.

This kind of teamwork requires that we first and foremost share in the decision making processes. It is not sufficient decide what you want to do as an agency and just go ahead and start implementing. The process of consensus building and internal consultations are very important. Sometimes some of you value the external consultations more than the internal ones thus ignoring the team in the long run. It is also important for you in the process to contribute data and share knowledge so that every member of the team will be as enlightened as you are and

can talk on your behalf when the need comes. This calls for open, honest, and effective exchange of information between members.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have found it necessary to initiate the process of bringing the heads of agencies together and to work towards building a formidable team to enable us realize our common goal. These meetings are a process that will enable all of us gathered here to:

- Better understand the overarching health systems goals and objectives across all Agencies
- Gain direction and improve the effectiveness of the work within respective Agencies through clear priorities, better decisions making and improved relationships with other Agencies
- Leverage similar process with other Agencies in order to avoid duplication of work
- Provide strategic input to the political leadership of the Ministry of Health and also influence policy and funding decisions within the Health sector.

The objective of this first meeting is to revive the interagency Leadership Group and to build consensus on the Draft Terms of Reference of the Ghana health Interagency Leadership Committee.

I have attempted to flag a few critical areas with the hope that these would elicit responses and reactions from the experts and practitioners present here. Seeing such a distinguished gathering, I am confident that practical and implementable recommendations and strategies would emanate from today's deliberations, which would go a long way to build a stronger and united workforce within the health sector.

I would like to conclude by expressing my sincere wishes for the success of the meeting and all of us assembled here to revitalise our commitments towards working together as one family. On this note it is my pleasure to declare this inaugural meeting duly open.

I thank you for your attention.