

*Nursing and Midwifery Training College, Zuarungu*

*Graduation and Matriculation Ceremony*

*Theme: Quality Nursing and Midwifery Education: the role of stakeholders*

*Keynote Address Delivered by*

**Dr. Vida Nyagre Yakong, University for Development Studies, Tamale, N/R**

**Venue: College Ceremonial Grounds, Zuarungu, Upper East Region**

**November 25, 2023**

**Mr. Chairman**, of this important occasion, the Regional Minister, Upper East, the Upper East Regional Director of Health Services, Board Members of Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana (N&MC), the Member of Parliament, Bolga East Constituency, the District Chief Executive, Bolga East, the Principal of Zuarungu Nursing and Midwifery Training College, Principals of Sister Colleges, Affiliate Institutions, the Chief of Zuarungu, Staff, my professional colleagues, the graduating class and freshers of this exceptional Nursing and Midwifery Training Program, Distinguished invited Guests, friends of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocol duly observed.

I am deeply honoured and humbled to stand before you today to address this remarkable gathering. Today, we celebrate not only the climax of years of hard work, dedication, and resilience but also the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of our esteemed graduates and to also, welcome fresh students into this noble institution. This graduation marks the culmination of a rigorous journey that required not only the determination and commitment of our graduates but also the unwavering support of numerous stakeholders who have played a pivotal role in shaping the future of healthcare.

**Mr Chair**, Nursing and Midwifery are not just professions; they are callings. A calling that requires selflessness, compassion, empathy and an unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. The quality of care provided by Nurses and Midwives directly impacts the health and lives of countless individuals. There is no doubt that Nurses and Midwives form the largest workforce in the healthcare industry of the country. This is why the quality of Nursing and Midwifery education is of paramount importance. It is the foundation upon which our healthcare system is built.

As we stand on the threshold of a new era in healthcare, we must recognize the critical role that stakeholders play in shaping the quality of Nursing and Midwifery education.

The theme I have been tasked with today, "*Quality Nursing and Midwifery Education: The Role of Stakeholders*," is not just a set of words; it represents a fundamental truth that lies at the heart of Nursing and Midwifery education. Quality education in these fields is not the sole responsibility of the students, Faculty, or institutions. Instead, it's a collective effort that requires active involvement and dedication from all stakeholders, working hand in hand to shape exceptional healthcare professionals. When I started to reflect on the topic, I remember my days in Bolga Nursing Training College, I remember what was available to us as students to facilitate our learning and what was not available two decades ago and what it is like today for current students. But what is the difference between now and then as we continue to reflect on?

**Mr. Chair, Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen,** I wish to thank the organizers of the program and for the timely choice of theme for reflection. I continue with my presentation reflecting on the following;

1. Educational institutions
2. Faculty and Mentors
3. Students
4. Healthcare Institutions and Clinical Preceptors
5. Government and Regulatory Bodies
6. Healthcare Professionals and Alumni
7. Community and Patients and,
8. Conclusion

### **1. Educational Institutions**

**Mr. Chair, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,** first and foremost, the institutions that offer Nursing and Midwifery education have a significant role to play. They must maintain rigorous academic standards, create a conducive learning environment, including recreational facilities, and provide access to the latest technology and resources including a 'state of the art Skills training laboratory'. These institutions must also adapt to the evolving needs of the healthcare sector, ensuring that their curricula remain up-to-date and relevant as well as context based. It is also important that institutions focus on establishing collaborations with both local and international organizations who have vested interest in Nursing and Midwifery education. These collaborations help in enhancing the institution's development and learning from best practice from elsewhere.

### **2. Faculty and Mentors**

**Mr. Chair**, our dedicated educators, mentors, and clinical instructors, are the backbone of quality Nursing and Midwifery education. Their expertise, guidance, and mentorship are crucial in shaping the next generation of Nurses and Midwives who must be full of compassion and empathy. Their commitment to excellence is an inspiration to us all. It is a fact that all the necessary resources could be provided for training but when Faculty lacks sense of commitment to their duty, excellence in Nursing and Midwifery education will be a challenge. In addition to their commitment, Faculty members at every level also need to be motivated to upgrade themselves to enable them contribute to quality education. They must build their research skills and conduct research in order to inform their teaching and curriculum development. Unfortunately, very limited opportunities exist for such upgrading and research. Many scholarships for higher education focus on other disciplines to the neglect of Nursing and Midwifery. There must be a deliberate plan to ensure that Educators at the Nursing and Midwifery Training Institutions move on to acquire higher certificates including PhDs. There is also the need to recruit more faculty members as student numbers increase yet staff numbers remain the same in most cases. This has negative impact on staff welfare and career progress.

### **3. Students**

**Chair, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocol observed**, To our graduates, your relentless pursuit of knowledge and unwavering commitment to the well-being of your future patients have brought you to this moment. Your dedication to lifelong learning is vital to maintaining high standards in the field hereafter.

However, there is a particular paradigm shift that is emerging among trainees all over. This shift is from quality to quantity and from pursuit of knowledge to pursuit of lack of appreciation and respect for knowledge but must earn a certificate. Many training institutions witness an upsurge in unprofessional and unacademic conduct during examinations. Students' engagement in examination malpractice has become so common and to some extent, normalized among students. They enter examination halls with phones containing content for examination and wrapped in papers and used as menstrual pads. Some download artificial intelligence Apps in their phones that find answers online for their questions. Some write content under their dresses and on their thighs to copy. Such students risk cancellations of their papers, rustication or even dismissals. I find this to be an embarrassment to the profession that values truth, hard-work and academic excellence. Instead of these unprofessional and unethical behaviours to be condemned, we rather have some politicians, some members of management of the institutions and community leaders, including Chiefs, stand in the way of ensuring quality education by asking that such students remain unpunished. Heads of Schools receive countless calls from

some people who should have known better, asking for favours to free such students and labelling them as wicked when they stand their grounds to ensure the right thing is done. The students who should have been ashamed of their misconducts also issue death threats to examiners and invigilators who caught them carrying out this academic misconduct. Our dream to ensuring quality education for Nursing and Midwifery in Ghana may remain at the level of a dream if some stakeholders continue to serve as barriers to quality education instead of facilitators. It is a source of worry when quality education in Nursing and Midwifery is politicized. As stakeholders we need to rethink the implications of our role in this journey.

**Mr. Chair**, another challenge that is a threat to quality education is the calibre of students selected for admission into the programmes. Most students are admitted based on protocols and political pressure. These students come in with some perceived entitlement because of their affiliations to politicians. They have the attitude that says “I must pass examinations even if I have do not study”. This results in poor academic performance and the issue of examination malpractice sets in. We need to revisit this aspect of our admissions processes and give training institutions the freedom to select and admit qualified students in order to maintain the standards needed to ensure quality education. Ghanaian Nurses and Midwives are the most highly sought for outside this country because of the quality education that they receive compared to other countries and that must be upheld.

#### **4. Clinical Preceptors and Healthcare Institutions**

**Mr. Chair**, the practical experience gained in clinical settings is invaluable. Healthcare institutions and the preceptors who mentor students during clinical rotations play a pivotal role in nurturing their skills, knowledge, attitudes and professionalism. However, it is also becoming a challenge because of the huge student numbers in some institutions. These numbers overwhelm the health facilities, thus making difficult for Nurse-Managers and Preceptors to properly engage in quality mentorship. In some instances, some clinical settings and Preceptors also relax their roles and allow students to get away with misconduct, including absenting themselves from clinical practice without sanctions. Training of these students is a collaborative work between training institutions and health facilities. We expect that students at this level begin to realize and accept the fact that to be a nurse or midwife is to be highly responsible and committed to duty and the call to care for humanity. We cannot afford to produce Nurses and Midwives that can pose danger to the public and future generations. We need all hands on deck in order to ensure quality education.

## 5. Government and Regulatory Bodies

**Chair, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,** government Agencies and Regulatory Bodies establish and enforce standards that ensure the quality of Nursing and Midwifery education. Their role is to protect the public interest and promote excellence in healthcare through accreditation and licensure. However, in recent times we see all kinds of institutions springing up as training institutions for Nursing and Midwifery. Some of these institutions are highly unprepared for such programmes and pose serious challenges for quality education. It is important that Regulatory Bodies do not waver when there is the need to crack the whip to ensure quality education is not compromised. The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana has, over the years, maintained standards and that is why other African countries come to Ghana to learn the best practice. They must not relent on this.

Mr. Chair, a conducive learning environment which contributes to quality education has remained a challenge also. Most institutions lack adequate classroom space for students and decent offices for tutors. These are key facilitators for quality education. It is important that government supports institutions with infrastructural development to support quality education.

As we speak of quality education, we also need to review the different programmes that exist and upgrade them to a level that is consistent with international standards. In most countries, the entry point for Nursing and Midwifery is first degree. It is time for government and the Regulatory Bodies to revisit the processes that were started to make this move but short-lived for political reasons. We need to end the certificate training and move on to first degree level. We also need to create opportunities for those with certificates to be upgraded to first degree level to improve their skills for quality service delivery. Ghanaians deserve more than what we have today. For me it is unthinkable that we have enough professional nurses sitting at home with no jobs and yet we continue to train for certificate. Nursing and Midwifery education in Ghana has advanced to the extent that we cannot afford to continue training certificate holders when all the opportunities are available for a change for better. This is the time for all the Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges to be upgraded to degree-awarding institutions. I want to take this opportunity to challenge Government and its Regulatory Bodies to move faster than ever with the processes that would bring to an end the certificate programmes and begin with the first degree programmes for improvements in healthcare service delivery in the country and beyond.

## **6. Healthcare Professionals, Unions and Alumni**

**Mr. Chair, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**, to our graduating class, as they embark on their career journeys, they join the ranks of healthcare professionals who are not only responsible for the well-being of patients but also for upholding the standards of our professions. They must provide compassionate care to their clients and patients; be empathetic and not join those who make access to healthcare unappealing because of their attitudes towards patients. It is my hope that as you move out into the world with the quality education that you received from here that you will delivery service with compassion, empathy and love for humanity. You must embrace the ideals and values of the professions.

Also, as Alumni you can play a crucial role by providing mentorship to trainees, networking opportunities, and supporting your alma mater. However, for you to do this better, I encourage you to form a strong Alumni Association. This way, you can support the institution that made you who you are today for future generations to benefit. And who knows, you can come back and join the teaching staff. You must also commit to lifelong learning in other to upgrade yourselves and promote the profession that you belong.

**Chair, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**, the Unions also play a key role as stakeholders. They are expected to monitor and contribute to reshaping curricular of the programmes and to ensure that practice reflects the education received.

## **7. Community and Patients**

**Mr Chair**, the community and patients are among the most vital stakeholders in the journey of Nursing and Midwifery education. They rely on the care and expertise of graduates like you. Their feedback, trust and support are invaluable in assessing and improving the quality of education that graduates receive and the care they deliver.

As we acknowledge the pivotal roles of these stakeholders, we must also remember that our mission is far from over. Healthcare is an ever-evolving field, and the demands on nurses and midwives are constantly changing. As professionals, you must remain adaptable, resilient, and committed to ongoing education and improvement.

## **8. Conclusion**

Mr. Chairperson, the Regional Minister, Regional Director of Health Services, Board Members of Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana (N&MC), the Member of Parliament, the District Chief Executive, the Principal of Zuarungu Nursing and Midwifery Training College,

Principals of Sister Colleges, Chief of Zuarungu, distinguish invited guests, graduating students, matriculants, all protocol duly observed. In conclusion I want to emphasize that quality Nursing and Midwifery education is not merely a process; it's a shared responsibility. The future of healthcare depends on the quality of education we provide for our students today, it depends on our dedication, collaboration, and continuous pursuit of excellence. Together, as stakeholders in this noble endeavour, we can ensure that the healthcare professionals we produce are well-prepared, compassionate, empathetic, caring, empowered with the right attitudes and committed to providing the highest quality care to all.

Congratulations to the graduating class and thank you to all the stakeholders who have supported and continue to support the noble cause of quality Nursing and Midwifery education in this institution and in Ghana as a whole. Together, we can make a positive difference in the lives of countless individuals and the health of our communities.

Thank you and best wishes for a successful and fulfilling career in nursing and midwifery! And for the matriculants, I wish you all the best in your educational journey in this noble institution. Remain open-minded, study hard, avoid shortcuts to success and you will succeed with joy.

God bless us all!!