

PRESS STATEMENT DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, HON. ALEX SEGBEFIA
ON THE ONGOING ILLEGAL STRIKE ACTION BY THE GHANA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(GMA) ON 18TH AUGUST, 2015, 9:00am AT THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS
CONFERENCE ROOM

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press. We have invited you here this morning to brief you about the current situation on the on-going illegal strike action by the Ghana Medical Association (GMA).

Brief History of Negotiations till date

After stalled attempts to conclude Conditions of Service document, in February 2015, the Ministry of Health tasked a team to review the draft Conditions of Service and ensure that it was finalized and implemented. The team had representatives from external stakeholders such as the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Public Services Commission, Fair Wages and Salaries Commission and the Attorney General's Department. The rest of the members of the team were representatives drawn from internal stakeholders such as Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service, the Teaching Hospitals, recognized labour Unions and Associations.

The team was inaugurated on the 16th February, 2015 with representation that included the GMA.

The team examined the 2006 and 2009 draft Conditions of Service under the guidance of three key documents:

1. Single Spine Pay Policy of Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC)
2. Human Resource Management Policy Framework and Manual for Ghana Public Services, 2015 of Public Service Commission.
3. Operational Human Resource for Health Policy document.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press, on 26th June, 2015, after a series of meetings, the team signed off and submitted to the Honourable Minister of Employment and me, a finalized Framework for Negotiating Conditions of Service for the Ghana Public Sector Health Workforce. Immediately after receiving the document, I directed that negotiations should begin to transform the Framework document into Conditions of Service.

In view of this, within two (2) clear days upon signing off the Framework, Rules of Engagement was developed and signed independently between the Government Team and the four Unions and Associations of the Public Health Sector namely; Ghana Medical Association (GMA), Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA), Government Hospitals Pharmacists Association and the Health Services Workers Union (HSWU) on 28th June, 2015. The Unions and Associations were asked to submit proposals of which GMA was the first to submit so negotiations began with GMA on the 29th June, 2015.

Current Situation

Currently, the Doctors have indicated that they will continue with the strike action for a further two (2) weeks. This translates into continuous withdrawal of services from Out-Patient Departments (OPDs) and emergency services.

The Doctors have indicated they will continue to see in-patients although by definition, these numbers will steadily decrease as no patients are being admitted from the Out – Patients Departments and the Emergency Departments.

Illegality of the Strike:

Government has indicated clearly that the strike action is illegal and against all laid down negotiation principles. Government has clearly indicated after appealing to the humanitarian, legal and ethical instincts of the Doctors to call off the strike. This has fallen on deaf ears.

Government has indicated that it cannot negotiate with the Doctors whilst they are still embarking on the illegal strike action.

Government recognizes the right of workers to negotiate for better conditions of service. Without prejudice to the right of GMA to negotiate for better conditions of service, Government considers the impact of the strike action on the lives of Ghanaians as unacceptable.

In order to minimize the effect of the strike on our people, I have directed that:

1. Heads of facilities should ensure that their facilities resume the provision of full range of health services by Wednesday, 19th August, 2015.
2. Effective Thursday, 20th August, 2015 all members of GMA who have not reported and assumed full duty shall be considered as being on strike and in clear breach of the Labour Act.
3. Heads of facilities are also requested to monitor and provide weekly updates on which health workers are at post to my office.

4. House Officers:

According to the Health Professions Regulatory Bodies Act 857, 2013, a

House Officer means “a practitioner who is doing housemanship while Housemanship means a period of training in an approved hospital or in an institution by a practitioner who has completed basic medical or dental training in a recognized institution or University”. House Officers during their period of training also render invaluable service to patients and to the larger population.

The implications of this strike on the timely completion of Housemanship by this category of doctors among others includes delayed completion of their training for full registration as medical and dental practitioners.

It is therefore prudent that House officers remain at post while arrangements are made for their supervision and further placement.

The Medical and Dental Council is being consulted to ensure that their training objectives are duly achieved without undue delays.

5. Physicians/Medical Assistants

Physicians and Medical Assistants are being deployed wherever possible under the supervision of Doctors who are ready and willing to work.

Friends from the media, additionally, about 25 quasi health facilities, 178 hospitals/clinics of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), private health care providers and retired doctors

across the country are supporting in delivering healthcare while we take legitimate steps to restore normalcy.

These include:

FacilitiesLocation

University of Ghana Hospital, -Legon

Atomic Energy Commission Clinic-Kwabenya,

Airport Clinic-Airport

37 Military Hospital-37

Police Hospital -Cantonment

VRA Hospitals - Osu Akosombo and Aboadzie

Bank of Ghana Clinic -Ridge

GBC Clinic -Kanda

SIC Clinics-Tudu

Ghana Post Clinic-James Town

Cocoa Clinics - Kaneshie, Kumasi, Debiso

Ghana Commercial Bank Clinic-Kantamanto

Graphic Clinic-Adabraka

University of Ghana Medical School Clinic -Korle Bu

Kwame Nkrumah University Hospital - Kumasi

Cape Coast Hospital-Cape Coast

University of Development Studies Clinic -Tamale

University of Development Studies Clinic -Wa

Anglogold Ashanti Hospital -Obuasi

Ghana Port and Harbour Authority Hospital/Clinic -Tema, Takoradi

Valco Hospital -Tema

Ghana Bauxite Hospital -Awaso

Bui Dam Clinic - Brong Ahafo

Ghana Consolidated Diamond Clinic-Akwatia

SSNIT Hospitals - Osu, Adenta, Madina, Tema, Dansoman

I want to take this opportunity to call on the GMA Executives to call on its membership to return to work to pave the way for negotiations to resume. As I have said before, the consequences of the illegal strike action are sometimes irreversible and there is no justification for any loss of lives.

At this juncture, the number one priority of Government is to ensure that the people of Ghana are able to receive healthcare . The lives and welfare of the people of Ghana take centre stage in terms of Government's priorities. We will take whatever steps are deemed necessary to ensure the welfare of Ghanaians. In this regard the Ministry of Health has not only presented assorted medical supplies but also posted additional nurses and midwives to the Police and 37 Military Hospitals to assist their colleagues to provide adequate and proper healthcare. Similar interventions are being rolled out in other health facilities.

I take this opportunity to thank all members of the GMA and other health workers who have continued to work; the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), Quasi – Governmental

Institutions and private clinics and hospitals who have provided services to Ghanaians during these challenging times.

Government sympathizes with family members who may have lost their relations as a direct result of this illegal strike.

Threats/Intimidations

There are some reports of threats and intimidation of Doctors who wish to work. This is their right and any such act is a criminal offence which if verified will be met with the full rigors of the law.

Let us continue to behave in a tolerant manner. Let me be quick to add that as reiterated by his Excellency President John Dramani Mahama, despite the doctors being on strike nobody and he means absolutely nobody has the right to abuse them.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the media, fellow Ghanaians in a related development, as we work to protect life and restore normalcy, we are also retaining all the Cuban doctors who have completed their rotations and were programmed to leave for Cuba anytime soon. As many of you know, we have a long-standing arrangement with Cuba and other countries where doctors from these countries are brought in every year to augment the number of doctors we have in Ghana, to help in health care delivery. Before this current impasse, we were in the process of bringing in 177 doctors. This process is on-going.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to reassure the people of Ghana that my Ministry and Government will do everything in its power to make sure that the lives of people in Ghana are not put in jeopardy. I urge the GMA to call of their illegal strike to pave the way for negotiations to continue. Once again I thank the significant numbers of doctors and dentists who are at post, and will work to make sure that this impasse is settled in the shortest possible time.