

# Doctor is patron, lesson to Ghana



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Patients in the waiting room of the medical center in Emena, Ghana, call it the American clinic.

By HOWARD W. FRENCH  
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EMENA, Ghana — On a continent littered with grand projects that inevitably seem to give way to shoulder-high grass and dust, Emmanuel Tuffuor set out to create something lasting.

The Cleveland physician left Ghana at age 20 and graduated from Case Western Reserve University's School of Medicine in 1980. After interning at Mt. Sinai Medical Center, he opened a private practice in East Cleveland and shares another at Emery Green Medical Associates in Warrensville Heights.

In 1991, sensing the timing was right, Tuffuor returned to Ghana long enough to build a 75-bed hospital in this village of a few thousand people in his native Ashanti region.

He named it the Aninwah Medical Center, after his late grandmother, who worked hard to see that her only grandson and his seven sisters were formally educated. All became professionals.

Suddenly, villagers who had always relied upon traditional healers, or taken long treks to rundown government health centers, were discovering the pleasures of being treated by diligent doctors working in a spotlessly clean environment.

"The reason I wanted to do this is, I am a very good example of a product of American philanthropy," said Tuffuor, 45, who attended CWRU on scholarships. He began setting aside money 10 years



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Dr. Emmanuel Tuffuor inside his medical center in Ghana.

ago for the clinic, which he envisions as a foothold rather than an isolated health care mecca.

"My biggest challenge now is to create an infrastructure," he said from his East Cleveland office, to which he returned earlier this month after a brief visit to Emena.

He would like to see other health care providers set up services there, he said, and to have his clinic used as a base for

studying diseases that — in a world shrunk by easy travel — may not remain confined to the developing world.

Why didn't he return to work permanently in his native country?

Because he would not be able to do nearly as much living there as he can running the clinic from America, Tuffuor said. Greater Cleveland hospitals have donated used equipment, and his fellow Rotarians in Ohio's Rotary Club District 6630 help stock the pharmacy and handle shipping.

"Cleveland has been such a major part of this," said Tuffuor, who is on staff at Mt. Sinai Medical Center and University Hospitals, and is a clinical instructor at CWRU.

"As a physician, I thought I could make an impact by making people healthy," he said. "Constantly holding out a pan and asking for contributions is not effective.

"But the only way to get people to take responsibility for their health care is to make health care affordable."

Tuffuor, who lives in Shaker Heights with his wife and three children, did not have the luxury of simply standing back and admiring a feat that had already cost him half a million dollars, he said.

Soon, a clash of cultures pitted the naturalized American, who un-self-consciously refers to the West as "we," against Ghana's potent mixture of ancestral values and its legacy of past state socialism.

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Where Tuffuor is imbued with the ideology of the self-responsible individual, Emena, like much of the region, is locked in a view of this world that shares misery as freely as it rations comfort.

Before he knew it, Tuffuor was being swarmed by relatives, long-lost kinfolk and poseurs alike, who demanded jobs or free care.

As the reputation of his "American" clinic grew, even well-off people from nearby Kumasi began turning up for treatments for which they refused to pay.

"We have people who take off their *kente* cloth at the junction and show up in rags," Tuffuor said. "That's just how things are in a place like this once word has spread that there is an institution out there taking care of people."

Meanwhile, Tuffuor was scorned by his own village for having chosen a different site nearby for the construction of his marvel.

"People would see me coming and assume I was carrying a pot of gold," Tuffuor said. "And when I was looking to buy land, some people in my village wanted to take advantage of that."

Finally, struggling to sustain his clinic from his base in Cleveland, Tuffuor said that each time he returned to Ghana he would find huge amounts of supplies missing.

"I have had to worry about everything, down to the nuts and bolts of the hospital, and I don't mean its functioning," he said. "I mean the pilfered hardware. Things were disappearing all over the place."

With woes like these on the rise, last year Tuffuor faced the grim prospect of having to close down his dream only three years after it opened. Then he struck on the idea of persuading his younger sister, Afranie Appiagyei, to return to Ghana from Toronto to serve as a full-time administrator.

Far from reining in her brother's vision, Appiagyei, a former social worker, has expanded it radically. No longer content just to deliver health care, she and her brother are attempting a sort of cultural revolution without which, they feel, little lasting good can be done here.

The hardest part, they say, has been persuading the community that the hospital was not merely a rich man's gift, but something

they had to support. Likewise, they had to convince a hospital staff that once napped or moonlighted freely that it is real work that produces pay.

Moving to shore up the hospital's finances, they have introduced \$100-a-year health insurance policies for the poor, created a credit union that partly matches peasants' contributions, and sold higher-cost coverage to Ghanaians living abroad who wish to take care of relatives back home.

"Here, if people have their own business, they work very hard, but if it is for someone else, forget it," Appiagyei said. "Since I've arrived, if you don't work, you don't get paid, and in Ghana that is quite a revolutionary concept."

"One thing I have learned from her is that to be an administrator there are no fixed hours and no days off," said Eric Addae, 24, a professor recently recruited by Appiagyei to help run the place. "You have to make work your hobby and take pleasure from it. For that lesson I am grateful."

That is also Tuffuor's view. He said he uses his vacation time at the clinic because "I enjoy the difference I can make so much that it's better than a real vacation."

These days, the buzz inspired by this ethic c throughout the complex slung buildings with tens of cactus and flower

The hallways are cor being mopped. Nurses r stantly from ward to wa ing on patients. And de fices are always busy.

Perhaps the best m the hospital's performa ever-greater distances tients seem willing to treatment there.

"The care here is be what we were findi where," said Comfort J had brought her hu stroke victim, nearly away from home for tre Emena.

For Tuffuor, cases bring satisfaction enoug pensate for his troubles.

"One day, health care will be a profitable bus it's not likely in my life said.

"We have always had of turning away the poo handling the rich, but ever it was that caused to be dreamt, that woul rible disappointment."

Plain Dealer reporte Lesie contributed to this