



Africa Higher Education Health Collaborative



**KNUST**  
KWAME NKURUMAH UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Family & Community Medicine  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

# “A Mighty Oak Tree”

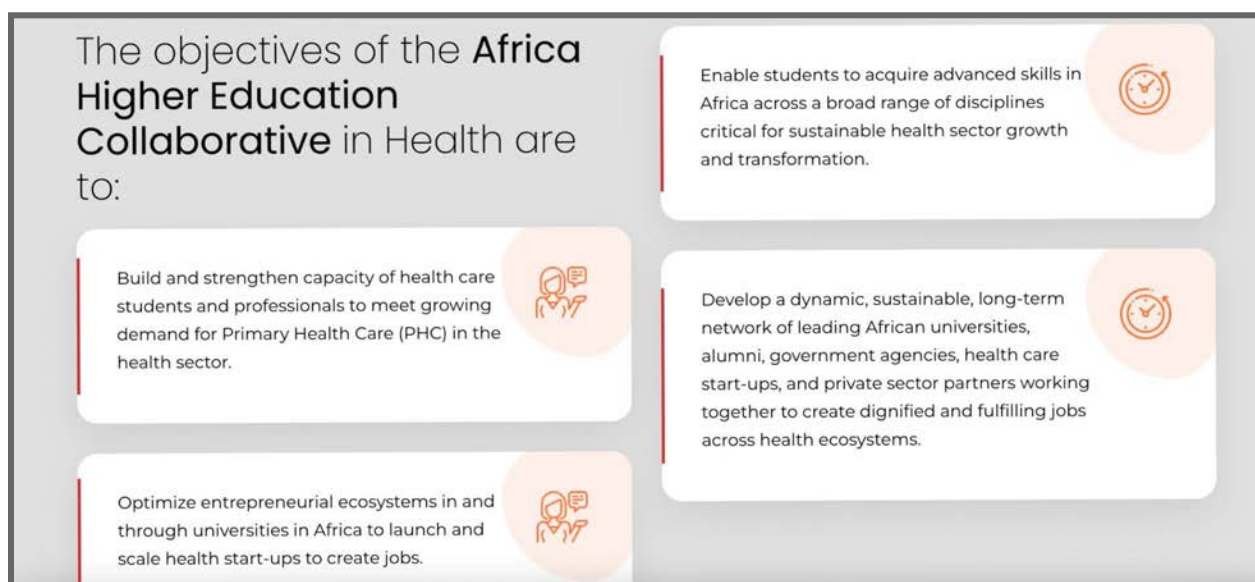
Africa Higher Education Health Collaborative (AHEC)  
Health Employment Pillar (HEMP)

**Palliative Care Short Course Field Report**

September 2023

## Preamble

**AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION HEALTH COLLABORATIVE (AHEC):** The Mastercard Foundation’s (MCF) Health Strategy holds enormous potential to transform African health sectors. Within a framework of respect, inclusivity, equity, reciprocity, ethics, dynamism, stewardship, the University of Toronto (U of T) and MCF are collaborating with eight leading higher education institutions in Africa to support their efforts to **train and prepare young professionals for the meaningful work of growing African health sectors**. The shared vision is to provide the training, knowledge and hands-on experiential learning required for developing high-quality and equitable health-care delivery in Africa, by Africans, for Africans. The AHEC objectives are:



In October 2022, under the AHEC’s Health Employment Pillar (HEMP), the *Department of Family and Community Medicine (DFCM) at the University of Toronto (U of T)* was invited to collaborate with *Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)* in the **co-creation and co-delivery of continuing education programs to enhance the competency of primary care practitioners in a number of key areas. KNUST aims to support and build an empowered health workforce, with a particular focus on women.** The intended audience for these programs includes primary care providers (PCPs), ranging from community health nurses, nurses, clinical officers and general practitioners, who work in the primary care sector of Ghana, in settings ranging from the community to district hospitals. Specifically, KNUST and DFCM are collaborating to co-create five “short courses” on the following five topics: **Palliative Care, Quality Improvement for Health Professionals, Prehospital Emergency Care, Community Emergency Care, Emergency Preparedness and Response to Epidemic-Prone Diseases.**

Between September and December 2023, seven teams of DFCM faculty will be travelling to Ghana to co-deliver these short courses alongside KNUST faculty. There are sixty DFCM and

KNUST faculty plus a large team of DFCM/KNUST/OVPI senior leaders involved in this initiative. Approximately 100 Ghanaian primary care professionals will participate in the short courses during the fall of 2023.

## Introduction

When Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Ellis Owusu-Dabo of KNUST visited the U of T with the KNUST/AHEC leadership team, he was asked by Dr. Katherine Rouleau to describe his vision for the future. He spoke about **rethinking, redreaming, and recreating a more sustainable world**. He then spoke about the AHEC partnership between KNUST and U of T as a mighty oak tree. This tree would have deep roots and strong branches that would provide shelter and nourishment to the people of Ghana and beyond for generations to come. Together, the leadership of KNUST, DFCM, and U of T's Office of the Vice-President, International (OVPI), affirmed **our commitment to this sustainable and vibrant vision**.



*Picture: Dr. Danielle Martin (Chair, DFCM, U of T) presenting Dr. Ellis Owusu-Dabo (Pro-Vice Chancellor KNUST) with a plaque of commemoration.*

And with that, the first of seven short courses under the **health employment pillar (HEMP)** of AHEC was launched and co-delivered by a team from U of T and KNUST in Ghana in September of 2023. Dr. Jennifer Wilson (DFCM's MCF Faculty Partnership Lead) and Marie Therese Ndiaye (Regional Lead HEMP, OVPI) accompanied the team. They were joined by Ernest Asamoah who is the OVPI Program Office for Western Africa based in Accra, Ghana.



*Picture: Opening Ceremonies of the Palliative Short Course*

## **Palliative Care Short Course**

**Palliative Care (PC)** is an approach that **improves the quality of life of patients and their families** facing the problems associated with serious illness through the prevention and relief of suffering and treatment of pain and challenges associated with serious illness, whether physical, psychosocial or spiritual (WHO). **Palliative care is recognized by the WHO under the human right to health.** It should be provided through person-centred focus with the support of integrated health services that pay special attention to the specific needs and preferences of individuals. **Healthcare providers have a critical role to play in the implementation and integration of PC services.** Given that nurses and other health care workers constitute the largest workforce in the healthcare system, their strategic position is essential to the quality and effectiveness of PC service provision and integration. This course introduced participants to the principles of palliative care, goals of care, whole patient assessment, pain management, difficult

communication /conversation, management of selected symptoms, legal and ethical issues in palliative care and data management.

## **Learning Objectives**

- 1) To equip the healthcare providers with the essential knowledge and appropriate attitude required in the provision of palliative care.**
- 2) To equip the healthcare providers with the requisite palliative care skills required in providing quality care.**
- 3) Evaluate the needs (i.e. physical, psychosocial and spiritual) of patients and their family members and prescribe appropriate interventions.**
- 4) Describe the pharmacology of essential medicines used in palliative care.**

### **KNUST Faculty Teachers**

Dr. Arti Singh (KNUST Lead)  
Dr. Perditer Okyere  
Dr. Abigail Kusi Amponsah  
Dr. Michael Owusu Ansah  
Dr. Mawuli Gyakobo

### **DFCM Faculty Teachers**

Dr. Kirsten Wentlandt (DFCM Faculty Lead)  
Dr. Amy Nolen  
Dr. Sandy Shamon

### **DFCM Co-Creation Contributors:**

Dr. Jamie Meuser, Dr. Paolo Mazzotta, Dr. Kayla Wolofsky, Dr. Marwa Fagir, Dr. Adam Goldman, Dr. Kate Whitehead, Dr. Kavita Algu, Dr. Salman Bahammam

### **OVPI**

Marie Therese Ndiaye  
Ernest Asamoah

## **The Co-creation Process**

Between March 2023 and September 2023, the KNUST and DFCM co-created the curriculum for this short course. Platforms for co-creation included Zoom, email, Google drive, and WhatsApp. Non-travelling faculty from KNUST and DFCM also participated in the development of the curriculum. Teams met regularly to share resources, feedback, and track progress.

## Travel to Ghana

Preparations for departure included orientation, the creation of a Travel Manual, booking of international and domestic flights, hotel bookings, and application for a scholarly travel visa which required a number of supporting documents. Dr. Princess Acheampong (KNUST Liaison Officer) partnered with Jamie Rodas (DFCM Global Health Program Coordinator) to coordinate travel plans.

The team flew to Accra and were greeted by the KNUST hosts. The team stayed overnight at an airport hotel in Accra and then travelled by domestic airline to Kumasi the following morning.



*Picture: DFCM faculty team boarding the domestic airline.*

## Course Delivery

The course was delivered at the NODA hotel in Kumasi from Monday, September 18 to Wednesday, September 20, 2023. The conference room was equipped with AV equipment, wi-fi and air conditioning. Our DFCM and KNUST faculty co-delivered the course with excellence, enthusiasm, and creativity. A variety of pedagogical techniques and strategies were deployed throughout the three-day course. Co-delivery included lectures, small-group exercises, group discussion, role-playing, daily recaps, and interactive audience polls. Real-time feedback was gathered through the use of the “Mentimeter” presentation tool. This feedback allowed faculty to quickly make adjustments to both the content and delivery over the course of the three days. Electronic copies of all presentations were made available to the participants at the end of the training. Dr. Jennifer Wilson, Marie Therese Ndiaye, and Ernest Asamoah attended teaching sessions and conducted formal observership evaluations.



*Picture: Participants in class*

## Course Participants

Twenty course participants from various locations across Ghana were selected by KNUST to attend the course. The application and selection process was managed by KNUST. The different cadres of health care workers included nurses, midwives, health assistants, health information officers and physician assistants.



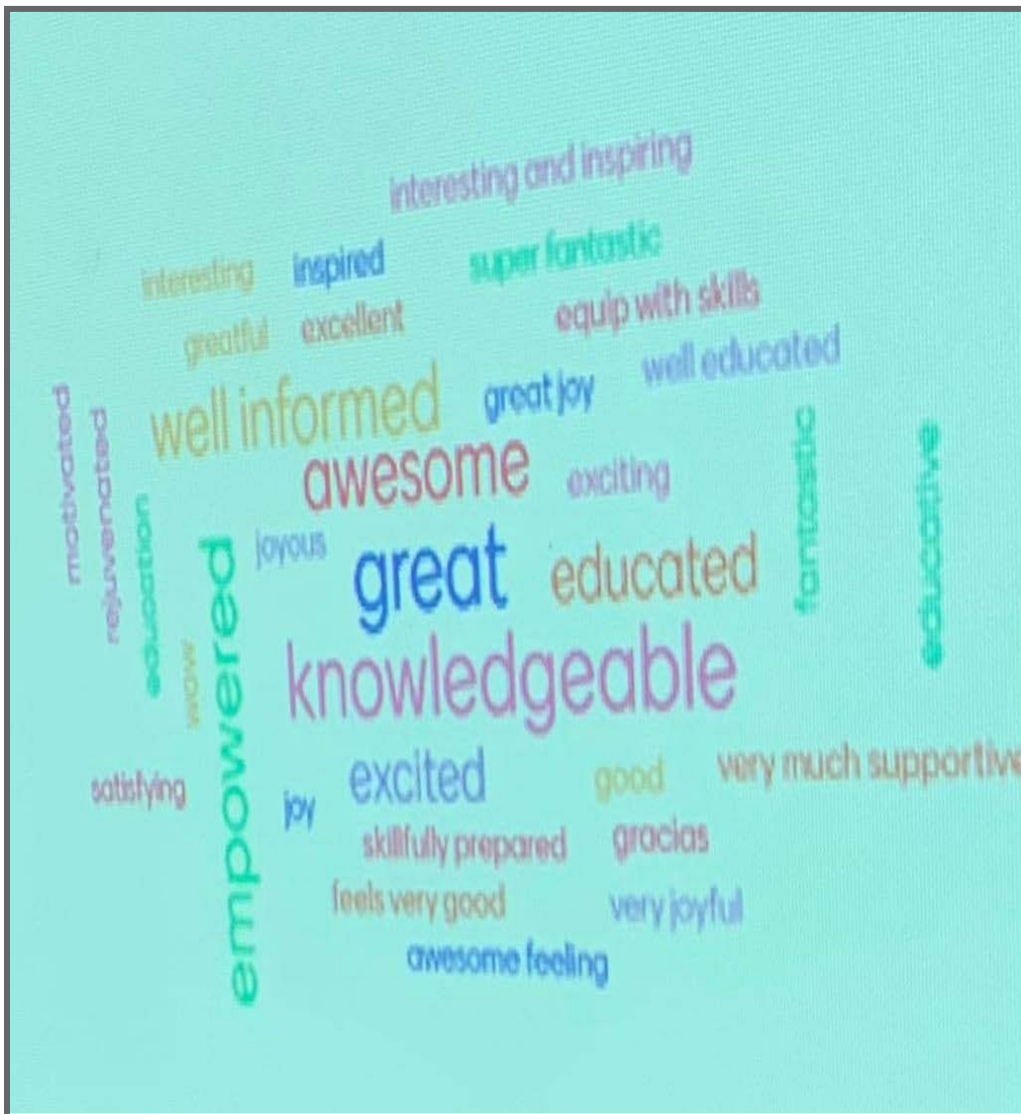
## Evaluation Plan

Dr. Kulamakan (Mahan) Kulasegaram, Director of DFCM's Office of Education Scholarship (OES) joined the leadership team to create an extensive evaluation plan for all of the short courses. **The evaluation strategy engaged our teachers and learners to understand the experience of learning in these innovative courses.** Learners gave high-level feedback through the end of the course evaluation which showed that the vast majority found the course learning experience, course content, and teachers to be highly effective. As a whole, the learner group was very likely to recommend the Palliative Care course to their colleagues and indicated they would take follow-up courses at KNUST. Our data collection team was able to interview 8 teachers (4 Canadian, 4 Ghanaian). This data will **help us triangulate learner experience and identify particularly effective learning moments from the perspective of teachers.** Of particular interest will be moments of adapting during teaching and lessons learned for future iterations of this course. Supplementing this data are structured observations (n=9) and reflections from



trained observers. **These observations will further help us identify opportunities to enhance course teaching and learner engagement.**

While we await the formal evaluation report of this short course (100% participation rate by course participants), here are the participant answers to a Mentimeter question, **“How are you feeling at the conclusion of this short course?”**





*Picture: Dr. Wilson pictured with the KNUST qualitative evaluation team who were trained by DFCM's OES.*

## Future Planning

Dr. Kofi Mensah (HEMP Pillar Lead), Dr. Jennifer Wilson (DFCM MCF Partnership Lead) Ernest Asamoah (OVPI) and Marie Therese Ndiaye (Regional Lead, HEMP, OVPI) met together to discuss plans for 2024-2027.



## Closing Ceremonies

Our hosts planned a spectacular closing ceremony for faculty and participants that included African drumming and dancing, speeches, a delicious meal, and the presentation of certificates and gifts. It was a memorable evening for all.



*Picture: Each participant was presented with a certificate including Continuing Professional Development Points. DFCM' Palliative Short Course Faculty Lead Dr. Kirsten Wentlandt presenting certificates to the participants.*



*Picture: DFCM Faculty wearing their new Ghanaian dresses, made by a local seamstress.*



*Picture: Cultural dancing and the talking drums were a highlight of the closing ceremonies.*



*Picture: The first graduating Palliative Care short-course class together with the KNUST, DFCM, OVPI leadership.*



*Picture: Dr. Kirsten Wentlandt (DFCM short course lead), Dr. Amy Nolen, Dr. Sandy Shamon, Ernest Asamoah (OVPI in Accra), Marie Therese Ndiaye (OVPI), Dr. Jennifer Wilson (MCF-DFCM Partnership Lead) received personalised banners adorned with the crests of KNUST and U of T.*

## Sightseeing

Dr. Princess Acheampong planned and accompanied our team on a memorable three days of sightseeing.

The sightseeing tour began by visiting the spectacular KNUST campus.



We then travelled South to Capecoast where we visited one of KNUST's resorts/training facilities. We were welcomed with fresh coconut water before enjoying a dinner of fufu, goat soup, chicken and rice.



*Picture: Marie Therese, Dr. Princess and Dr. Jennifer enjoying fresh coconut water.*



The following day we visited Kakum National Park and participated in an exhilarating canopy walk.



Our final excursion took us to the Elmina Castle, preserved as a World Heritage Monument under UNESCO. We learned about the history of the castle and its expansion when slaves replaced gold as the major object of commerce. We stepped foot into the grim dungeons, punishment cells, and the Door of No Return where an estimated 7 millions slaves passed through. As academics who study and teach structural determinants of health, we were left with much to reflect upon. We were challenged by the tour guide's final two words as we stepped away from the Door of No Return. *"Never again," he stated. "Never again," he repeated.*



## Final Reflections

While debriefing between KNUST and U of T continues and while evaluational material is being collected and analysed from this first short course, we would like our concluding thoughts to be those of Ghanaian colleague Professor Samuel Newton, the Dean of the School of Public Health at KNUST. Professor Newton spoke about how, when Professor Ellis and the AHEC team explained the mighty vision for this collaborative project, he was overwhelmed. He could not imagine how such



lofty plans could be turned into tangible actions. He concluded by congratulating the partnership team for all their hard work and their endless hours of service to actualize this plan. *“What was abstract, is now becoming clear,” he stated.*

Many of us from Canada, could relate to Professor Newton’s sentiments as we too felt overwhelmed to be **called into leadership of this massive collaborative that seeks to generate and integrate new knowledge, co-create new strategies, and build capacity locally and globally through mutual learning through long-term individual and institutional relationships.** One of the greatest surprises for us was how quickly and how deeply these relationships took root. Although the days are early, we are thrilled to report that we are off to a strong start. Dr. Princess referred to our collective leadership as *“pacesetters”* who have set the bar high. We have collectively caught Professor Ellis’ vision of the mighty oak tree and believe that the objectives of this collaborative can and will be met as we **uphold the principles and values of equity, transparency, inclusivity, sustainability, and evidence-based curriculum development and evaluation.**

Respectfully submitted by,

**Dr. Jennifer Wilson, MD, CCFP(EM), FCFP**

Lecturer, Department of Family and Community Medicine,  
*University of Toronto*  
Department of Family and Community Medicine,  
*Mastercard Foundation Faculty Partnership Lead*  
Director of International Partnerships, *Leyaata Hospital, Ghana*



*Picture: Dr. Jennifer Wilson and  
KNUST Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Ellis*

**Jamie Rodas, MPH**

Program Coordinator, Global Health and Social Accountability  
Department of Family and Community Medicine  
Faculty of Medicine, *University of Toronto*



*Picture: Jamie Rodas with Dr. Princess Acheampong*