



**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**  
CAPE COAST, GHANA, WEST AFRICA  
COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND ALLIED SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF MEDICAL SCIENCES



**COMMUNITY BASED EXPERIENCE AND SERVICE (COBES) UNIT**

**REPORT ON COBES PROGRAMME  
2022/2023 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**NOVEMBER 2023**

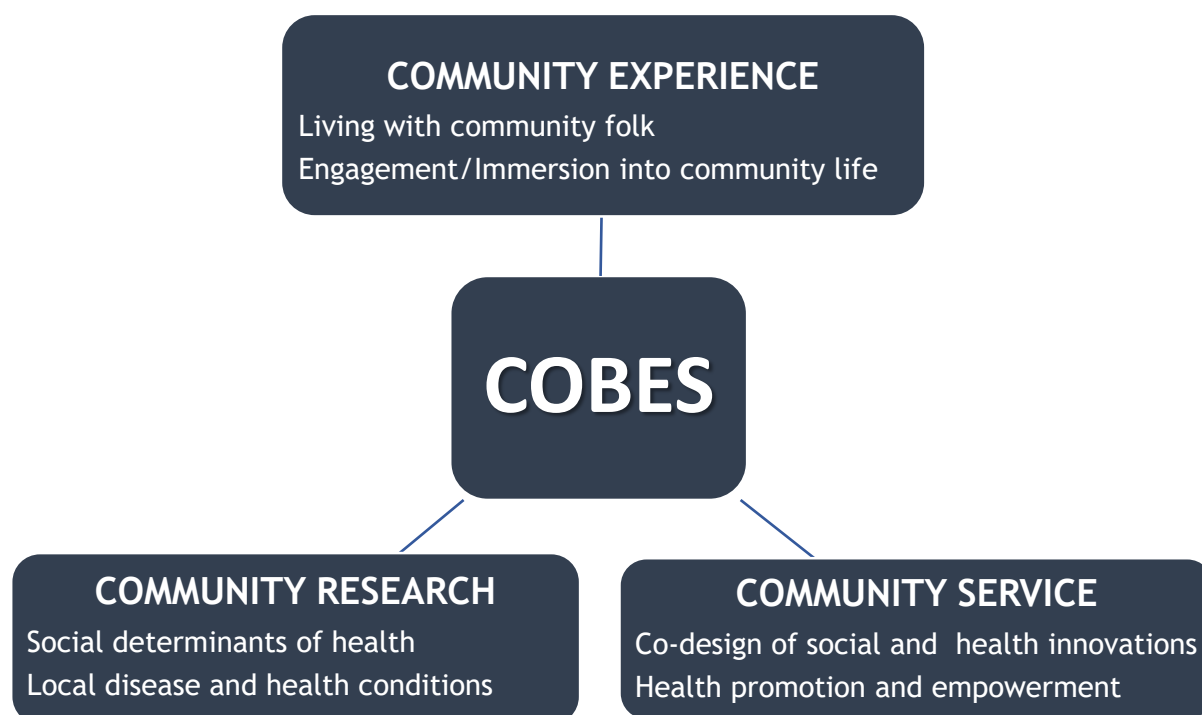
## **Background to the COBES programme**

The holistic training of medical and health professionals is of essence considering the varied determinants of health. The Community Based Experience and Service (COBES) programme of the University of Cape Coast School Medical Sciences (UCCSMS) was instituted with the goal of producing doctors who are relevant and sensitive to community needs. The programme is delivered following an innovative, community-based, problem solving, and student-centered approach. It gives the students a strong community orientation which serves to increase their awareness of the role of social, cultural and environmental factors in health and the relationship between health and development.

The programme is guided by the under listed objectives:

1. To produce high calibre medical doctors, and other health professionals who have a broad-based education, are people-centered, community-oriented and research conscious. Our students are trained to use their acquired medical knowledge to provide appropriate solutions for the existing medical problems within the community.
2. To train doctors to provide leadership and example in dealing with the ethical and moral problems confronting the community.
3. To be a conduit for establishing a centre of excellence in medical research into diseases commonly found in Ghanaian communities
4. To create and maintain strong collaborative links with local and international organizations and institutions involved in community health and education through exchange programs and collaboration in multicentre medical research and healthcare solutions.

There are three (3) key strategic elements for the implementation of the COBES programme of UCCSMS: 1) Community Experience, 2) Community-Based Research and, 3) Community Service. These are illustrated as follows:



### **Pre-COBES preparations**

- *Site preparation* – The Dean’s Office wrote to inform the relevant authorities in the districts within which our COBES host communities are situated. These included the various District Chief Executives (DCE), Directors of District Health Services and local Chiefs and their Elders. Several trips were also made to prepare the UCCSMS permanent COBES hostel facility in Akim Adjobue to ensure the facility could comfortably accommodate the various groups of students (L200, L300, GEM L400, and GEM L300) to be hosted in the facility. Key priorities in such preparations included, lighting, water supply, and general sanitary and hygiene in the

facility. Such was the case for the facility in Assin Kushea as well. In the case of L500, an advance team consisting of the Faculty Officer, School Accountant and the COBES Coordinator visited all the sites to secure conducive accommodation for the students.

- *Module teaching and learning resources* – Prior to the posting of each level for COBES, a module guide was developed by the COBES coordinator in consultation with members of faculty. The guide was subsequently circulated to members of faculty for their comments and input before a final version was published. The guide spelt out the module goals and specific learning outcomes to be attained at the end of the posting. The data collection instruments were developed for each level and mounted onto the computer assisted personal interview (CAPI) software for digital administration using portable mobile devices by the students. The final module guide together with the CAPI tool, student groups and staff schedule for each COBES posting was disseminated to all members of faculty and students ahead of time.
- *Pre-COBES briefing* – A pre-COBES briefing was organized for each level prior to their COBES postings. The coordinator often gave a briefing on the core principles and objectives of the posting, individual roles, the lodging and logistical arrangement, as well as the conduct expected of them. In many instances, the Dean, Vice-Dean, and Faculty Officer participated and took turns to address the students and staff present. The pre-COBES briefing for L500 was held online via zoom, while that of L200 and GEM L300 were held at the UCCSMS auditorium. In the case of L300 and L400, the usual pre-COBES briefing could not be organized on campus prior to departure, due to the tight schedule of the module preceding the COBES module. However, this was immediately conducted on site at the Akim Adjobue COBES hostel facility upon arrival. Again, the COBES executives of the class had prior meetings informally with the class at their own convenience prior to their departure.

### **Mode of COBES delivery**

The delivery of COBES for each level of students was based on the student-centered experiential learning approach in which students planned their activities and applied a problem-solving perspective to attain their learning goals. Students generally worked in groups to spell out their daily and weekly work plans characterized by task-sharing and task-shifting. This approach is meant to inculcate the values of discipline, teamwork and professionalism in the students. They were supported by facilitators who provided ready on-field guidance on a regular basis. Meetings were held with facilitators and staff at the close of each day to deliberate on the day's activities and resolve emerging field challenges.

In addition to the above, the delivery for L500 was augmented by seminars and field-practice internships organized in the various district hospitals and health directorates in which they were hosted. This included understudying the district health management teams (DHMT), hospital management teams (DHMT), community outreaches, facilitative supervision visits, as well as out- and in-patient interactions with facilitators.

### **Overview of COBES 2022/2023 postings**

The 2022/2023 COBES programme began in the second week of January 2023 and ran all through to the end of July 2023, with participating students being Levels 200, 300, 400, 500 and GEM L300. Each level of students that participated in COBES spent a period of three weeks on the field interacting and engaging with their respective host communities in a mutually beneficial way for the ultimate purpose of attaining the objectives of the programme (Table 1). Students at every point in time had at least four (4) faculty members as facilitators and four (4) support staff guiding and supporting their activities. At least two buses with drivers were usually on site to provide safe and reliable transportation services in the day-to-day activities. Monitoring and supervision teams

from both the College (CoHAS) and School (UCCSMS) led by the Provost and Dean, respectively, often visited the COBES sites to interact and address emerging concerns.

### 2022/2023 COBES Schedule

Level/Period	Pre-COBES Briefing	Overarching Theme	Site	Presentations
<b>L500</b> 09 Jan, 2023 – 27 Jan, 2023	05 Jan, 2023 (Online)	Health systems management, leadership and communication in provision of quality health care	Apam/Assin Fosu/Abura Dunkwa/Saltpond/ Twifo-Praso/Twifo-Heman/Takoradi	03 Feb, 2023
<b>L200</b> 13 Mar, 2023 – 31 Mar, 2023	09 Mar, 2023	Social, cultural, economic and environmental determinants of health and disease	Assin Kushea	05 Apr, 2023
<b>L400</b> 24 Apr, 2023 – 12 May, 2023	On-site	Gender, maternal and child health, and HIV/AIDS: Safeguarding the rights of girls now	Akim Adjobue	18 May, 2023
<b>L300</b> 22 May, 2023 – 09 Jun, 2023	On-site	Building a fairer, healthier world in the fight against malaria and parasite resistance	Akim Adjobue	15 Jun, 2023
<b>GEM L300</b> 03 Jul, 2023 – 21 Jul, 2023	27 Jun, 2023	Social, cultural, economic and environmental determinants of health and disease	Akim Adjobue	28 Jul, 2023

#### *Level 500*

Our L500 students were the first group of students to deploy for their COBES posting from 9<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2023. A total of 127 students were randomly assigned into six (6) groups and posted to district COBES site within the Central region, namely: Twifo Praso in the Twifo Ati Moko district (22); Twifo-Hemang in the Twifo-Hemang Lower Denkyira district (18); Assin Fosu in the Assin district (24); Abura Dunkwa in the Abura Asebu Kwaman district (21); Saltpond in the Mfantseman municipality (20) and Apam in the Gomoa West district (22). Over the three-week period, students were exposed to Ghana's three (3) tiered district health delivery system model

where they gained first-hand experience of the complex nature of health systems as a whole, particularly the Ghana's formal healthcare delivery systems (public or private) at the district level. They also conducted community surveys into clients' satisfaction with healthcare service delivery, and conducted breast cancer screening in their host communities.

### ***Level 200***

Level 200 students were next to be dispatched COBES for a period of three weeks from 13<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2023. This was their COBES debut with the goal of enabling students appreciate the role of social, cultural and environmental factors in the development of disease and health states across the individual, family and, community levels. A total of 87 students (46 females and 41 males) were posted to the UCCSMS COBES located in Assin Kushea in the Assin North District of the Central region of Ghana. From there, they engaged with surrounding communities – Ama Camp/Aboaboso, Bediada (Bunglo), Twifo Hasowodzie, Atwereboana and Sienchem – for the purposes of attaining the set learning objectives.

### ***Level 400***

Level 400 COBES span from 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2023 to 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2023. The fusing together of the regular and the GEM streams of students in L400 called for a renewed strategy in the delivery of the L400 COBES module. A total of 126 students were posted to the Akim Adjobue COBES site. From there, they worked in their respective communities within the Akim Adjobue enclave: Adjobue, Akwesi Awua//Camp/Kyerimankani, Anyinase, Ayebofo, Asuboa, Bontodiase, Chia, Kotokuom and Zevor. The theme for the posting was *Safeguarding the health and rights of girls now*. As such the students had the opportunity to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and wellbeing of women and girls in rural communities, with emphasis on their sexual and

reproductive health. Students screened women for a variety of health outcomes including hypertension, anaemia, urinary tract infections, malaria, blood sugar and anthropometry.

### ***Level 300***

The theme for the L300 COBES was *Building a Fairer, Healthier World in the fight against malaria and parasite resistance* with the posting spanning from 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2023 to 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2023.

The module specifically introduced the students to inequalities in the health and wellbeing of communities that stem from social, cultural and environmental factors, particularly with respect to malaria and its associated parasite resistance in rural settings. Thus, students were introduced to some basic malaria interventional research for the first time. A total of 86 students (35 females and 51 males) were hosted in the UCCSMS COBES site located in Akim Adjobue in the Akyemansa district to work in their respective communities ( Akyerkrom, Akokoaso, Besease, Mukyia, and Otabil) .

### ***GEM L300***

Unlike the regular students, the Graduate Entry Medical (GEM) students typically have their maiden COBES in Level 300, but with the same learning outcomes as the regular L200 COBES Module. The GEM L300 COBES was the last posting for the 2022/2023 academic year and students were on the field from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2023. Initial plans to secure a new COBES site at Gomoa Dago in the central region for the GEM L300 COBES were unsuccessful due to accommodation challenges. As such efforts had to be made to identify suitable communities within the Akyemansah district where the UCCSMS COBES hostel facility is site located. Four (4) new communities – Adubiase, Odumasi, Kofi Nimo and Gyewani – were secured as social laboratories for the execution of the GEM L300 COBES module. As in the case of L200, this was their debut COBES and it aimed to enable students appreciate the role of social, cultural and environmental



factors in the development of disease and health states across the individual, family and, community levels.

### **Post-COBES seminar**

The climax of all COBES activities is Post-COBES Seminar. The seminar usually has two (2) components: the Poster walk and Oral Presentations. The groups take turns to present to facilitators and other attendees their experience and learning over the three-week period spent in their respective communities. This year's seminars were marked by high participation by both students and faculty members. The quality of presentations by students were high compared with the previous year.

### **Module assessment**

At the end of each COBES module students were assessed and scored based on field participation, seminar presentations (poster and oral), and a written report of the posting. The total score for the Module is 100% (Field participation - 20%, Seminar presentations – 40% and written report – 40%). All students passed the COBES module for the 2022/2023 academic year.

### **Highlights of the 2022/2023 COBES period**

- For the first time, a survey was conducted to evaluate the COBES programme from the perspective of community members. This revealed the positive impacts of the programme on the community and their support for its continuity.

- Again, another survey was conducted with the Alumni of the School to assess the impact of the COBES programme on their professional lives, especially on the uptake of postings to rural and underserved communities.
- A number of manuscripts are being drafted from data collected through the COBES, with one (1) successful publication in that regard [Adongo, C. A., Tuoyire, D. A., Azuug, M., Appiah, A. B., Taale, F., & Amadu, I. (2023). Decolonising vaccine production: Unpacking Ghanaians' support for made-in-Africa vaccines. *Vaccine: X*, 14, 100283.]
- A presentation was made at the Social Innovation in Health (SIHI) conference in Uppsala, Sweden in October 2023.

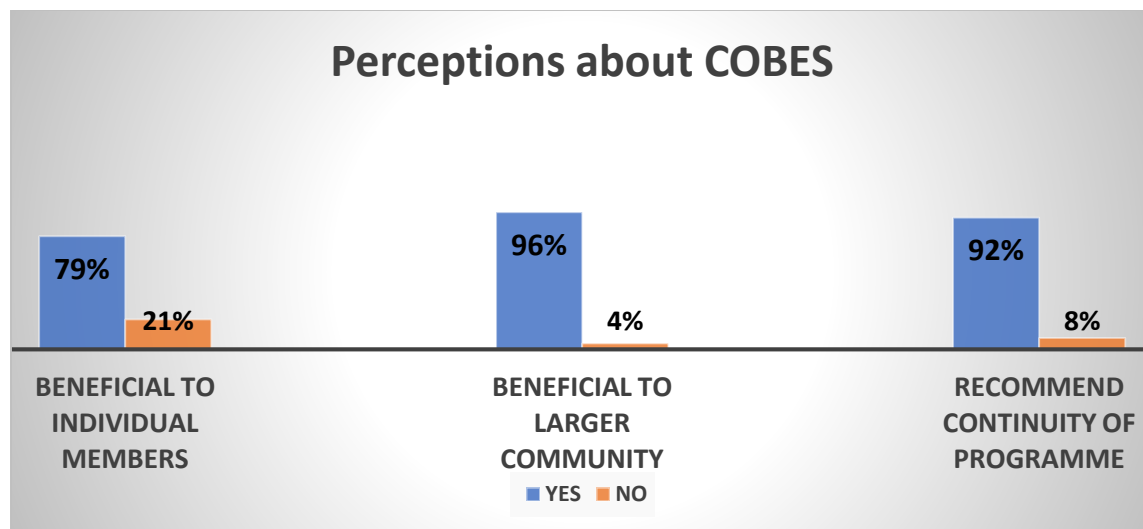


Figure 1: Excerpts of the community perception survey

## **Challenges**

- The limited number of vehicles (buses) and their frequent breakdowns (due to the age of vehicles) often leaves students and faculty stranded
- The lack of a dedicated vehicle for the Coordinator's movement and operations during the COBES season hampers the smooth running of the programme. Due to competing demand for the limited number of vehicles in the school, it is very common for some urgent trips by the Coordinator to be deferred
- Despite some improvements in faculty participation in the programme facilitators, the number of members of faculty who are committed and readily avail themselves to serve as facilitators on the COBES postings is inadequate. As such, only a small circle of dedicated members of faculty are often relied upon to facilitate the postings.
- The remuneration for COBES postings to some extent does not commensurate with the difficult working and living conditions, as well as other inconveniences that participants have to contend with. This further exacerbated by the tranche payment system which is equally fraught with bureaucratic delays
- Anthropometric equipment and other screening tools and logistics are still not enough, although some more have been procured
- Poor GSM network within the Adjobue facility affects telecommunications and poses safety concerns as staff and student are forced to stay out late on the street in order to access network for internet and phone calls
- Changes in the academic calendar post-COVID-19 has shifted the timing of COBES into the peak of the farming and raining season in the communities. This affects the level of community participation. Other important community events such as festivals with associated ritual bans on noise making affected some COBES activities, in particular exit durbars

## **Recommendations**

- Management should liaise with the transport officer to take concrete steps to address the myriad transportation issues associated with the effective running of the COBES programme
- The current remuneration modalities for participating in the COBES programme need to be reviewed for an upward adjustment of the amount paid and measures put in place to eliminate the tranche payment system and fast-track payments.
- There is the need to procure additional field equipment, tools and logistics to facilitate health screening and research activities during COBES.
- Management should support the COBES unit in its efforts to reignite interest, participation, commitment, and support of all members of faculty and staff in the COBES programme.
- While we wait for the telecommunication companies to improve service network quality in the Akim Adjobue area, management should liaise with the department of medical education and IT to procure more GSM signal boosters to be installed on the campsite in the interim to improve the existing service.