

Cameroon Association of Optometrists partners with Biaka Institute to train eye personnel

By Mua Patrick Mughe in Yaounde

The Cameroon Association of Optometrists, CAO, has reached an agreement with Biaka University Institute of Buea for the training of eye health personnel.

The training programmes will include one year top up Bsc optometry degree programme and a seven years Doctor of Optometry, OD programme.

The president of the Cameroon Association of Optometrists, CAO, Dr Enowntai Nkongho Ayukotang, says the initiative has been born due to the huge paucity of Eye care personnel in Cameroon.

“We have been working to get a tertiary institution to train more eye health personnel,” he said, adding that “We of the Cameroon Association of Optometrists, CAO just succeeded to get Biaka University Institute of Buea, accepting to host the training program”.

In a proposal document, a copy of which The Guardian Post procured, the initiators said the Doctor of Optometry, OD, is a seven years undergraduate doctorate degree programme to train high quality health professionals in the Eye care and Visual system, to provide the much needed optometric, visual science and eye care services to the people of Cameroon and beyond.

The Doctor of Optometry programme, they continued, is also operational in countries like USA, Canada, Ghana, Nigeria amongst others.

The World Council of Optometry, WCO, the document said, is the global professional body of Optometry and the main optometry body with official relation with World Health Organisation, WHO, and International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, IAPB.

“In Cameroon, the only registered optometric professional association is the Cameroon Association of



Optometrists, CAO. CAO is a very active member of WCO and the Africa regional professional body, African Council of Optometry, AFCO. According to the World Health Organization, WHO Prevention of Blindness and Deafness, PBD report, there are 285 million people who are visually impaired globally and about 39 million people are blind worldwide,” said the document.

In Cameroon, they said, about 1% of the total population is blind giving an approximate number of 240,000 persons, using the 2017 estimate of the Cameroonian population of 24million inhabitants.

“In addition, about three times the number of the blind are visually impaired, giving an approximate of 720,000 Cameroonians who are visually impaired. About 80% of those blind (about 192,000 Cameroonians), could be avoidable or cured. About 90% of the world’s visual impaired people live in developing countries and more seriously, it has been established that visual impairment has a strong correlation with poverty of a nation,” added the document.

“Eye Care service delivery cuts across most of the Sustainable Development Goals, SDG. This means there is a high

demand for quality eye care and health with equity, especially in the Central Africa sub-region where Cameroon is found,” it also said.

However, they said there is a huge paucity of human resources to deliver this services, in order to make it more accessible and affordable to all.

“This is where the very important need to train ODs comes in to eliminate these barriers as much as possible, by providing quality and equitable eye care services in line with the WHO/IAPB Global Action Plan (GAP2014-2019), which aims at reducing visual impairment by 25% come 2019” said the document.

The OD degree would prepare students for advanced opportunities in academic, corporate, and other professional settings, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Public Services and other relevant partners, added the association.

They said the programme would be hosted by the Department of Allied Health at the School of Health Science of the Biaka University Institute of Buea, BUIB, with a minimum staff strength of nine visiting expatriate lecturers included.