

INAUGURAL LECTURE

Professor Benedict N.L. Calys-Tagoe

*B.Sc. (Med. Sciences), MB.ChB., MPH (University of Ghana);
FWACP (WACP); FGCPs (GCPS); Post Grad. Dip. Th. (Maranatha)*

*Head, Department of Community Health,
University of Ghana Medical School (UGMS)*



Topic:
**Taming the Crab:
Insights into Cancer Care in Ghana**

Date: Thursday, April 2, 2026
Time: 5.00 p.m.
Venue: Great Hall

ASPIRATION

To transform lives and societies through unparalleled scholarship, innovation and result-oriented discoveries.

VISION

To achieve global impact through innovative research, teaching and learning, using a technology-driven and people-centred approach.

MISSION

To create an enabling environment that makes the University of Ghana increasingly relevant to national and global development through cutting-edge research and quality teaching and learning.

CORE VALUES

Integrity

We demand the highest standards of ourselves to earn the trust of others.

Commitment

We are committed to knowledge generation that positively impacts the lives of those within and outside our university community.

Respect

We provide others with a world-class experience that demonstrates our value for the diversity and contributions of members of our community.

Loyalty

We are committed to giving back selflessly to our university.



Inaugural Lecture

by

Professor Benedict N.L. Calys-Tagoe

Topic:

Taming the Crab:
Insights into Cancer Care in Ghana

Chairperson:

Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo
Vice-Chancellor

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ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS



- 4.30 p.m.
- **Arrival/Seating of Guests**
 - **Procession**
 - **Welcome Remarks/
Introduction of Chairperson:**
Mrs. Emelia Agyei-Mensah, Registrar
 - **Introduction of Lecturer:**
Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo
Vice-Chancellor
 - **Seperewa**
Mr. Osei Korankye
 - **Inaugural Lecture:**
Professor Benedict N.L. Calys-Tagoe
 - **Musical Interlude:**
Ghana Dance Emsemble
 - **Presentations**
 - **Chairperson's Closing Remarks:**
Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo
Vice-Chancellor
 - **University Anthem**
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 - **Recession**
 - **Reception**

ABSTRACT



Background

The word cancer literally means crab.

Cancer is a significant public health concern both globally and locally. Globally, over 20 million cases and 9.7 million deaths are reported annually. It is the second leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for nearly one in six deaths. Low-and-middle-income countries shoulder most of the cancer burden. Out of nearly 10 million cancer-related deaths worldwide, 70% were in low-and-middle-income countries. The disparity is even more striking in the case of cervical cancer where 90% of new cases and deaths from this preventable cancer occur in low- and middle-income countries.

In Ghana, approximately 27,385 new cases and 17,944 deaths are reported annually. Cancer incidence in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to increase by more than 92% between 2020 and 2040. It has been suggested that cancer cases might surpass malaria, TB and HIV combined by 2030, especially considering the rising cancer burden in low- and medium-HDI countries.

Contrary to what people think, cancer is not a homogenous disease. It is a complex and heterogeneous group of diseases characterised by uncontrolled cell growth and spread. There are over 100 different types of cancer, each with distinct biological characteristics, behaviors and responses to treatment. This heterogeneity makes cancer diagnosis, treatment and research challenging, but also drives the development of personalised medicine approaches.

Cancer Incidence and Mortality Rates in Ghana:

The most common cancers in Ghana are breast and cervical cancers (for females), prostate and liver cancers (for males) and Retinoblastomas and lymphomas (for children).

- Breast Cancer: The leading cause of cancer incidence and mortality among women, with over 5,000 new cases and approximately 2,400 deaths annually.
- Prostate Cancer: The most common cancer among men.
- Liver Cancer: The leading cause of cancer death in Ghana, prevalent in both genders.
- Cervical Cancer: The second most common cancer in females, with high mortality rates.

Cancer Control

In public health teaching, cancer control usually subscribes to the rule of thirds:

- About a third are preventable (through vaccinations, lifestyle modifications and reducing exposure to risk factors).
- About a third are potentially curable if detected early (through screening and prompt treatment).
- About a third would require palliation (focus on symptom control, pain relief, psychosocial and spiritual support and overall improvement in the quality of life).

This is not a law of statistics, but a planning and advocacy tool used by WHO, UICC and cancer control programmes. It is conceptually correct but not exact and, therefore, should not be interpreted rigidly.

Challenges to Cancer Control

There are a number of barriers to effective cancer control in Ghana. The key ones are:

- **Limited availability of cancer data (lack of cancer registries)**
e.g. we have no reliable data on the proportion of women with cervical disease (precancer or invasive) who have received treatment. The WHO target is 90%.
- **Limited access to cancer screening and treatment services**
e.g. only 3% of women in Ghana have been screened with a high-performance test like HPV-DNA by age 35. The WHO target is 70% by 2030.

- **Financial toxicity (high cost of cancer care)** – most cancers are not covered by NHIS and for those covered, the tariffs being paid are not realistic, hence providers are reluctant to offer services.
- **Late presentation and diagnosis of cancer cases** – more than half of all cancer patients present late due to a myriad of factors.

Way Forward

- Establishment of population-based cancer registries with clearly defined sustainable funding.
- Decentralising cancer screening and treatment services
- Implementation of free PHC.
- Improve/expand funding sources of NHIS so they can pay realistic tariffs to service providers to encourage service delivery.
- Strengthening of community-based awareness campaigns and early detection programmes.

Conclusion

Most of the common cancers in Ghana are either preventable (cervical and liver) or curable if detected early (breast, cervical and prostate) and this presents us with a window of opportunity. We can significantly decrease the morbidity and mortality from these cancers by:

- Improving and sustaining HPV vaccination (we have so far achieved 84% of the 90% target for elimination of cervical cancer by 2030).
- Introducing HBV at birth (to reduce incidence of liver cancer).
- Establishing cancer registries to track cancer patients across the entire continuum of cancer care.

The knowledge and skills required to achieve this already exist, what remains is the political will and commitment.



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PROFILE



Benedict Nii Laryea Calys-Tagoe is a Professor of Community Health with expertise in epidemiology, disease control and surveillance. He is a distinguished physician, educator and public health leader whose career spans clinical practice, academia, administration, international research and faith-based service. His works reflect a deep commitment to advancing health equity, building institutional capacity and mentoring future generations of health professionals.

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Professor Calys-Tagoe attended the Presbyterian Boys' Secondary School (PRESEC), Legon where he obtained his GCE 'O' and 'A' level certificates.

He earned his BSc (Medical Science) and MBChB from the University of Ghana Medical School (UGMS) and a Master of Public Health from the University of Ghana School of Public Health. He is a Fellow of both the West African College of Physicians (WACP) and the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons (GCPS).

His specialised training includes a Certificate of Expertise in Cancer Registration Methods from the African Cancer Registry Network, Rapid Response Team Management (CDC, 2020) and a Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Global Health Research at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. In 2024, he earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Theology from the Maranatha University College, reflecting his commitment to integrating faith and service into his professional life.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE AND RESEARCH FOCUS

Professor Calys-Tagoe is an accomplished Epidemiologist and Public Health Practitioner with over 23 years of clinical practice and 19 years of public health practice and research.

Professor Calys-Tagoe's research centres largely on the epidemiology of non-communicable disease, with particular interest in small-scale mining, cancers and neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease, dementia and stroke. His works include genomic studies of these conditions within African populations, contributing to global efforts to understand disease patterns in underrepresented communities.

His foundational interest in occupational epidemiology stems from his early work on artisanal and small-scale gold mining. As a Principal Investigator in the "Integrated Assessment of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining" project, he led the human health component of a multidisciplinary collaboration involving researchers from Ghanaian institutions and colleagues from the University of Michigan. This work examined the health, environmental and policy implications of artisanal and small-scale mining practices in Ghana.

Professor Calys-Tagoe has been involved in several high-impact research projects in the area of Stroke. These include the Stroke Investigative Research and Educational Network (SIREN) project which, till date, is the largest study of stroke among Blacks. He has also been involved in a project that studied Ethical, Legal and Social Implications (ELSI) of Stroke genomic research. Other neurological research projects he is involved in are the 'Transforming Parkinson's Care in Africa (TraPCAf),' the Recruitment and Retention of Alzheimer's Disease Diversity Genetic Cohorts in the Alzheimer's Disease Sequencing Project (READD-ADSP) and the Origins of Alzheimer's Disease In African Americans (a study that seeks to unravel the racial and/or ethnic disparities in Alzheimer's Disease genetics and epidemiology).

He is very passionate and deeply involved in cancer research - focusing on breast and cervical cancers and the development of cancer registries in resource-limited settings. His research aims to improve early detection, rational control, treatment access and public awareness of cancers.

Professor Calys-Tagoe serves as a reviewer for several peer-reviewed journals and has authored/co-authored several (over 80) peer-reviewed articles which have been published in very high-impact journals like *The Lancet*.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Following completion of his 'A' level, he was posted to the Amenfiman Senior Secondary School in the then Wassa Amenfi District of the Western Region where he taught Core Science.

After completion of medical training, he worked as a House Officer and later as a Medical Officer at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital (KBTH). He was later appointed as a Public Health Specialist at the Department of Surgery, KBTH.

Professor Calys-Tagoe officially joined the Department of Community Health, University of Ghana Medical School, in 2014, after teaching pro bono in that Department for seven years. He also served as Visiting Lecturer at Family Health University Medical School, Ghana College of Physicians and Narh Bitu College.

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENTS

Professor Calys-Tagoe has held a wide range of strategic and administrative roles within and beyond the University of Ghana. He is currently Head of the Department of Community Health, UGMS. His previous roles include Departmental Academic Advisor, Hostel Tutor and Departmental Examinations Officer.

He is a member of the University's Academic Board, the College of Health Sciences Academic Board and its Research Board. He chairs the Epidemic and Health Risks Management Committee of the UGMS and contributes to several statutory and ad hoc committees, including those focused on infection control, scholarships and institutional partnerships. Beyond the University, he has served as Chapter (National) Chairman, Secretary and National Training Coordinator of the Faculty of Community Health, WACP. He is a longstanding Field Supervisor for the Ghana College of Physicians. He served as Registry Manager and a member of the Accra Cancer Registry Advisory Board as well as Senior Specialist in Clinical Public Health at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital.

He is a member of the Board of Directors of International Needs Ghana (INGH), a Christian NGO and the Vice-President of the Odade '92 Alumni Association.

CONSULTANTSHIPS AND TECHNICAL ENGAGEMENTS

Professor Calys-Tagoe has served as consultant on numerous national and international health initiatives. These include the Nationwide EPI Coverage Survey (2025), Global AIDS Monitoring Reports (2020) and Polio eradication efforts with the World Health Organization (WHO) and Ghana Health Service (GHS). He has also served and continues to serve as a consultant (Inspector for accreditation of schools offering medical training) to the Ghana Medical and Dental Council. He has led evaluations for maternal health projects, malaria control programmes and pandemic preparedness training. His consultancy work reflects expertise in surveillance systems evaluation and health systems strengthening.

TEACHING AND MENTORSHIP

He teaches undergraduate courses in Community and Population Health and is involved in the training of over 200 medical students annually. He has supervised over 140 undergraduate theses and more than 30 graduate theses, including MPH, MPhil, PhD and Fellowship dissertations across the Ghana College of Physicians and West African College of Physicians and Surgeons. He is a trainer and a mentor to several young doctors as well as early-career researchers.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER AND ASSESSOR ROLES

Professor Calys-Tagoe has served as an external examiner in Community Health to all the public medical schools as well as most of the private medical schools in Ghana. He has also served as an External Examiner to the University of Sierra Leone. He serves as an assessor for promotion at the University of Ghana and the University for Health and Allied Sciences.

Prof. Calys-Tagoe serves as an Internal Assessor for PhD, MPhil and MPH candidates at the University of Ghana and is an examiner for the West African College of Physicians and the Ghana Medical and Dental Council.

CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ENGAGEMENTS

Professor Calys-Tagoe has demonstrated sustained leadership and scholarly presence across national and international platforms. He has served as keynote speaker, moderator, facilitator, abstract reviewer and presenter at several major conferences and workshops. His contributions span themes such as stroke genomics, cancer epidemiology, health systems resilience and field epidemiology.

He regularly facilitates technical workshops, including systematic review training for the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons and has moderated scientific graduations for Ghana's Field Epidemiology Programme. His involvement in organising committees and panels reflects his influence in shaping public health discourse across West Africa.

HONORS AND AWARDS

He received the Best Scientific Meeting Presentation Award (2017/2018) from the West African College of Physicians, Ghana Chapter, recognising his excellence in research dissemination.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

He is a member of the Ghana Medical Association, the Ghana Public Health Association and the Ghana Epidemiological Association. He holds fellowships with both the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons and the West African College of Physicians.

CHRISTIAN LIFE

Professor Calys-Tagoe's spiritual journey began in the Anglican Church, but it was during his seven formative years of Presbyterian training at PRESEC that he made a personal commitment to Christ—an experience that laid the foundation for a life of unwavering devotion and service. His leadership in Christian ministry continued through his academic years. At the University of Ghana, Legon, he served as President of the Christian Medical Fellowship, demonstrating a passion for integrating faith with professional life. While in Medical School at Korle-Bu, he furthered this commitment as Organising Secretary and Contact Group Coordinator for the Korle-Bu branch of the fellowship.

For the past 26 years, Professor Calys-Tagoe has been a devoted member of the Korle-Bu Community Chapel, where he has served in numerous capacities. His roles have included: Member of the Missions and Evangelism Committee; Member of the Family Life Committee; Chair of the Disciplinary Committee; Current President of the Men's Fellowship and Former President of the Church Council of Elders. He is also a Lay Preacher.

His contributions to the church reflect a deep commitment to spiritual leadership and community development. Professor Calys-Tagoe's life is a testament to the harmony between professional excellence and personal devotion - a legacy that resonates not only in lecture halls and policy rooms, but also in the hearts of those closest to him.

FAMILY

Professor Benedict Nii Laryea Calys-Tagoe is the youngest son of Samuel Thomas Calys-Tagoe and Agnes Calys-Tagoe. He is married to Pearl, an accomplished Human Resources Practitioner and together, they are blessed with three sons (Kevin, Kirk and Kyan) who continue to inspire his commitment to building a healthier, more equitable future for generations to come.

UNIVERSITY ANTHEM



Hail University of Ghana
The nation's hope and glory
The place that bears the star of peace
That bids us all to do our best
Let the great Tower of learning
Inspire both young and old
May we proceed in unity to uphold the public cause.

//: Arise, arise O Legon
Defend the cause of freedom
Proceed in truth and integrity to make
Our nation proud: //

We ask for strength and wisdom
As we climb the hill of learning
May we excel in what'er we do
As we prepare to face the world
With a mind ready at all times
And a conscience quick to feel
May we proceed in unity to uphold the public cause.

//: Arise, arise O Legon
Defend the cause of freedom
Proceed in truth and integrity to make
our nation proud ://

(Prof. Emeritus J. H. Kwabena Nketia)
(1921-2019)



UPCOMING EVENTS

30th April, 2026

Inaugural Lecture by

Prof. Nicholas K. T. Dayie

Topic: When Microbes Speak and Data Appear Inconsistent, are we Witnessing Falsehood or Truth?

Venue: Great Hall | **Time:** 5:00 p.m.

17th April, 2026

Collaborative Event between the University of Ghana and The Royal Norwegian Embassy

Theme: Strengthening the Collaboration between Ghana and Norway in Higher Education and Research

Venue: To be communicated | **Time:** 8:00 a.m

