



# Isaac Mensah

## Ghana

### Nursing Officer

Isaac, a dedicated health worker in Ghana has spent the last three years working in the General Practice Department (GPD) of a local facility. Since his posting, understaffing has been a consistent issue. This has been the situation for as long as he can remember.

“When I first came, I was told that the staff is not enough, and I’d have to double up on my work,” Isaac recalls. “It’s been that way for three years now.”

Isaac shares that informal duties are frequently assigned and health workers in the facility are often required to take on responsibilities beyond their job descriptions. “We don’t have a fully functional mental health unit, but when patients come in with mental health conditions, we have to step in and provide support with the little training we have.” Isaac admits that this has been stressful, “you’re not only attending to mental health patients, but you’re also dealing with general medical cases as well.”

Isaac works 12- hour shifts and even longer when there are power outages.

“If there’s a power outage, you have to wait as the health information systems are digital,” he explains. “Sometimes that means waiting until 9 or 10 p.m. till the electricity comes back to finish attending to patients.”

Despite the overwhelming workload and the long hours, Isaac and his colleagues often receive no compensation beyond their regular government pay earning as little as \$1.30 per hour.

“My line of work has been tough on my mental health,” Isaac shares. “I’ve had breakdowns, burnout, and experienced severe fatigue, which have affected not just my work but my family life as well.”

Fortunately for Isaac, he has found support from his facility’s management. His medical superintendent helped him through his first experience with burnout, by providing a listening ear, encouraging him to take breaks, engage in activities outside of work, and conducting regular check-ins, which made a huge difference for Isaac.

He also shares that the facility is working to implement mental health support mechanisms, such as creating spaces for open conversations, offering additional leave days and organising activities outside of work to support the mental health of their health workers.

“I’m not alone in this,” Isaac says. “A lot of my colleagues are going through the same thing, but they don’t have the support they need. Some are even leaving the practice altogether because the conditions are too difficult.” To manage his mental health, Isaac now takes time to rest on weekends and during his time off, spending quality time with family and friends. He also seeks professional support for his mental health, where he has learned relaxation exercises and stress management techniques.

Looking ahead, Isaac envisions a resilient health workforce where mental health is prioritised,

stigma is erased, and every health worker has access to mental health resources and support. To celebrate World Mental Health Day, Isaac plans to visit a larger health facility outside his town with a fully-fledged mental health unit to offer sessions to fellow health workers and share his vision for a mentally healthy workforce.