

**George A. O. Alleyne**  
**Director Emeritus**  
**Pan American Health Organization**  
**Chancellor**  
**University of the West Indies**  
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First, let me thank you for the invitation to bring a brief message at the opening of this conference that celebrates 10 years of achievement of the CAAM/HP.

I bring you greetings from the University of the West Indies and from the Vice-Chancellor, who regrets not being here, given his special interest in regional accreditation. Our University of the West Indies is very pleased to be a part of this celebration and this is partly because we take a maternal or avuncular pride in seeing this authority come to this state of maturity. I recall very well the angst of medical students growing ever intense as 2001 approached when the GMC would withdraw its recognition of our medical graduates. The discussions with the Vice-chancellor, Rex Nettleford about other mechanisms for validating the quality of our medical training were interesting for several reasons, not least among them being his firm and unshakeable conviction that we had reached the stage at which we were self-confident and mature enough to determine if our products were of an appropriate standard. And this was not only in the field of medical education. Of course he was ably supported by Professor Marlene Hamilton. History has proved him right.

There is some historical significance to this conference being held here in Rose Hall. This was the site of the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CARICOM Heads of Government in 2003 where CAAM/HP was born and the Rose Hall Declaration on Regional Governance and Integrated Development:

*“Emphasized the need to intensify efforts to promote human and social development through, inter alia, appropriate education and training in order to improve the overall well being of the people of the Community.”*

This was in the context of the needs of the CSME and Professor Eddie Greene in describing the pillars and beams of the CSME architecture referred to accreditation as one of the beams which was essential. He said:

*“To protect the integrity of the qualified Caribbean medical practitioners after the withdrawal of the UK accreditation facility in 2001, CARICOM established the CAMP. The functioning of this authority provides useful*

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*guidelines for the operation of other such bodies to be established within the CARICOM system”.*

I take special note of the last part and it is a source of some regret to many of us in the University that there has been so little progress in the Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Accreditation Agency for Education and Training. This was predicated on the evidence of the *“uncoordinated nature of tertiary education initiatives in the Community which militates against the establishment of effective regional accreditation, validation, equivalency and quality assurance systems”.*

The progress in accreditation at the national level has not been matched by regional efforts.

During this conference you will hear of the progress the Authority has made over the past 10 years and the extent to which it has fulfilled the high expectations it generated at its start. It has gone beyond merely protecting the integrity of Caribbean health practitioners. It has been preeminent in establishing the standards for medical institutions throughout the Caribbean. It has been the leading, often the sole Caribbean interlocutor in the international accreditation fora. Of course much of the credit for this goes to the commitment of the Board of the Authority, its founding chair, Professor Sir Errol Walrond and its current chair Professor Marlene Hamilton, but special encomiums are due to the indefatigable Ms. Lorna Parkins its Executive Director. Her quiet tenacity of purpose, her superb organizational skills and her clear view of what the authority can and cannot achieve have been potent ingredients in its success to date.

The essence of accreditation is quality assurance-providing assurance to actual and potential stakeholders that the institution is fit for purpose and meets established standards. It can sometimes be a threatening process for the institution being accredited, but the institutional self-evaluation and improvement are worth the effort put into the process. Every good university takes the view that part of the benefit lies beyond the final stamp of approval and extends to the learning experience for the staff in the process.

Let me end with a caveat. Institutional accreditation can become an end itself if there is not constant vigilance. It can become a bureaucratic burden whose objective is the process. It can become so sterile that it is divorced from the values and *raison d'être* of the institution itself. However, I think that the auguries are good that this authority will not so deviate from its current path to become like that. I am sure that with the current board and the wisdom of the Executive Director, it will continue to flourish and be a testament to the capacity of Caribbean people to manage their own affairs and establish systems that ensure that the institutions among us meet appropriate standards of structure, function and performance.

I wish you a successful Conference and I am sure you will continue to receive support from the University of the West Indies.