

## AN INTERVIEW WITH

*Dr Benjamin Dabo Sarkodie*

*Dr Benjamin Dabo Sarkodie is a Lecturer at the University of Ghana Medical School and a consultant Vascular & Interventional Radiologist at Euracare Advanced Diagnostic and Heart Centre. Dr Sarkodie is Ghana's first Endovascular and Interventional Radiologist. He was trained in Ghana, the United States of America and Singapore. He is highly experienced in all relevant interventional techniques, which he performs using the cutting-edge medical imaging radiology equipment at his disposal at the clinic. Dr Sarkodie takes us here on a short tour of minimally-invasive, image-guided procedures in matters of diagnosing and treating diseases in nearly every organ of the human body.*

**ENJOY:** Dr Sarkodie, how would you define 'Vascular and interventional radiology'?

**Dr Sarkodie:** This is a very interesting area: what is vascular and interventional radiology about? A few years ago, almost every surgery entailed cutting the patient open, making big incisions, leaving a lot of scars, especially for dark-skinned people, and patients had a long hospital stay. But over the last few years, medicine has evolved and now, we do treatments that are minimally invasive, i.e. done with tiny cuts/pinhole incisions and under image guidance of ultrasound and x-ray. We can practically treat a vast range of diseases in almost every part of the body.

**ENJOY:** You made a presentation on fibroid and its treatment. Let's use fibroid, for instance, to illustrate here what you have just said.

**Dr Sarkodie:** In the past, the only way you could treat fibroid was to cut the woman open and take out the fibroids. Now, we can do a small incision on the patient's groin, perhaps less than half of a centimetre, and we put in some tubes and wires that go all the way into the vascular supply of the fibroids and block them off without destroying the womb. When that is done, the patient can go back home on the same day, with no scars with resolution of their symptoms. Once the blood supply of the fibroids are blocked the fibroid shrinks over time. That is a novel way of treating a fibroid case, away from conventional surgery. It is an alternative treatments to surgery. This is just one of many instances of vascular and interventional radiology.

**ENJOY:** Let me dwell on fibroid some more, Doctor. At what stage of the condition should the decision be taken to utilise minimally-invasive procedure? In other words, is interventional

radiology to cure fibroid as efficient at a latter stage of the tumour as it is at an early stage?

**Dr Sarkodie:** Most women with fibroid sometimes do not have any symptoms. So, a woman with fibroid who does not have any symptoms may not require any treatment. Some have symptoms, which can be intense bloating, bleeding, anaemia necessitating transfusion, severe painful menses. Those are the ones we like to treat. Treatment is not necessarily for everyone. We take the decision on who needs treatment after an initial assessment which often includes pelvic scans.

**ENJOY:** So how is the decision arrived at?

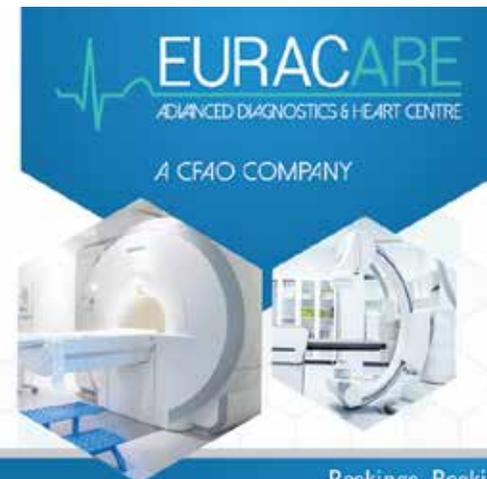
**Dr Sarkodie:** First of all, we assess the patient and then we take the decision that she will benefit from this treatment or she may not. Let's not forget that what we are talking about is an alternative to open surgery. There are some instances when we decide to treat using open surgery, either because the tumour is too big, or it has become cancerous. But most women with fibroids benefit from this procedure.

**ENJOY:** Can we say the decision whether or not minimally-invasive procedure should be applied depends on how serious the case is?

**Dr Sarkodie:** I will not say that. What I say is, we like treating women who have symptoms. The size of the fibroid does not necessarily matter. The occurrence of symptoms does.

**ENJOY:** It is known that men do not necessarily react the way they should, by quickly seeking medical advice, in the face of symptoms. A man with pains in the chest, for example, would not spontaneously decide right away to consult a doctor. Have you observed the same unfortunate behaviour with women?

**Dr Sarkodie:** Women appear to be more proactive than men when it comes to those issues, almost just like the way they take care of homes. When they see things, they report quickly, and that is really a good side of women. Again, women don't want to find themselves in a certain state. We have mentioned excessive bleeding as one of the symptoms, and affected women may have at times stain their dress



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as a result of heavy bleeding. No woman wants to be in that state. We can confidently say that they take their symptoms more seriously than men.

**ENJOY:** What is it that women should do or not do to avoid fibroid? Any anti-fibroid advice for women?

**Dr Sarkodie:** Unfortunately, no woman gets fibroid as a result of her doing, her actions, her behaviour or her inaction. One big trait identified about fibroid is that it has a genetic basis: a woman has a higher chance to be diagnosed with fibroid when her mother or her sister has it. But there is nothing really that can be done to prevent it. However, she can take control of her life when she has the symptoms by seeking medical advice and treatment.

**ENJOY:** Because fibroid is genetic, would it be right to say that when a woman's lineal ascendant had fibroid, she must be having regular check-ups in order to be able to tackle the disease as early as possible?

**Dr Sarkodie:** It is good for every woman to have a periodic scan. Every woman would want to have a scan, even before she gets married. When a woman gets pregnant also, she must have a couple of scans. However, let me stress that we don't want to let women feel they need treatment when they have fibroid and there are no symptoms. So we want to ask only those who have symptoms from their fibroid to seek help. Hence when you have fibroid and you don't have any bleeding issue, you don't have pains, you don't have any bloating symptoms or you don't have frequent urinary need cases, then you don't even need to seek treatment. In some cases, the symptom is infertility, and that should prompt the woman to go for medical care. In a nutshell, if a woman observes any of those

symptoms, it is important for her to seek a medical opinion. A simple scan will determine whether fibroids are responsible for her problem.

**ENJOY:** Apart from the fibroids, what other conditions are treated with minimally invasive procedures?

**Dr Sarkodie:** There is a vast range of such conditions. We already know about the heart, where we apply the same principle of using tubes and wires to access where we want to go and work on. Same treatment is used in the liver, to treat liver cancers; we use it on the legs in cases of varicose veins, of leg wounds/ulcers that would not heal just because the blood flow is not too good. In cases of blocked arteries in which case we can go in there, open up with balloons, put in stents and restore the circulation and thus save the patient from amputation. Very soon, when people get stroke in Ghana, we can, within a short period of time, go in, and offer treatment within a few hours by removing clots responsible for the stroke or coiling aneurysms. It is done in other countries, and we are working towards setting up such a centre in order to take care of early stroke situations.

**ENJOY:** You have treated patients using the minimally-invasive procedure. What have been patients' reactions when they are informed they will go through that procedure and what do they tell you afterwards?

**Dr Sarkodie:** Let's not forget that what we do is to give people

alternative options. In this fast and furious world, nobody wants to be away from work for long, nobody wants to be away from their family for long, and so, having the option of the minimally-invasive treatment is actually a very welcoming situation for the patient and for us, doctors, as well. And it is an interesting experience, given that most of these procedures are done without anaesthesia. Patient are given mild sedation made to be relax and that it is. After a few hours, they are on their way home. It makes me happy to see that I have put a smile on the face of somebody using this alternative.

**ENJOY:** To wrap up, doctor, any personal advice to women?

**Dr Sarkodie:** Women are very precious and we need them in every aspect of our lives, and so, issues of women are very dear to my heart. My message to them is that these days, there are lots of things that are avoidable and preventable. We have to consider that there is very high incidence of liver cancer in Ghana because hepatitis B infection is rife. The same way, there are lots of cervical cancers. Women who avail themselves for screening can save their lives through early detection and treatment. But the moment they wait till it's late, then we will have to do damage control. So let women offer themselves for screening. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, isn't it? Let every woman assess her breast and make sure there is no lumps there. Let me say, women should just take control of their lives. 🙌

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## The Art of Mastery.



Most parents I know are highly invested in their children. Their love drives them daily to avail their little ones of the best resources, attention, opportunities and guidance that they can afford. Our children are born with their own interests and talents, we may lead them toward a varied set of experiences, but how they interact with the material will always be unique to who they are. That is one of the things that what makes people so interesting. Each one of us is unique, when we finally find our true calling, then the fun begins. That said, there are a few things we as parents can do to help them find that calling and in it the satisfaction of harnessing their talents.

### 1. Allow a clear example:

Often children are held back at the demonstration phase, the instructor dominates the experience and therefore learning remains at a very basic stage. If our children are to truly learn, we must allow them to get stuck in.

### 2. Allow for many mistakes:

Think back to skills or information you are most confident of. Did you get it right the first time? Learning takes a whole lot of mistakes and

experiments. Often children are chastised too soon, deterring them from persevering. A simpler method would be to demonstrate again and again and then allow for action based learning.

### 3. Allow time:

In this fast paced world we live in, there is not enough time to experiment and explore concepts at the pace in which children learn. It is necessary that uninterrupted time is allowed for the absorption of each new topic.

### 4. Allow mentorship:

There is a reason why we learnt so much from our siblings about life and how to live it, simply put, children teach children with an attitude they can understand. Should we not use this approach with all new concepts? Once a few colleague or peer has mastered a skill, they might welcome the opportunity to share it.

### 5. Allow for access:

It is confirmed that humans learn best in a hands on fashion. Trying a concrete version of a concept or a life application of any subject is the best way to absorb new concepts. Book learning is the abstract form that can follow once the concrete real life application has been absorbed.



Kamilla Kirpalani Founder and Academic Director Maria Montessori Teacher Training Center Little Explorers Montessori Plus School

### 6. Allow for calm contentment:

It is rare for anyone to truly learn in situations of fear, anxiety and pressure. It is clear that people learn quickest when they are enjoying the experience. Let's be vary of stressors and try to eliminate as many as possible to encourage true skill growth in our children.

The mastery of any subjects brings joy and true passion, who knows down which path that passion will take our children? 🙌

