



# The Medical Team and the Advancement of Nigeria's Socio-Economic Development

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economic development

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The medical teams anchored by professionals (medical and dental) have immense roles to play on socio-economic development of Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> To address it is first and foremost important to compartmentalize the various developmental challenges of the country. into various. These include social problems as well as political problems, the division of which enables the identification of appropriate solutions to address them. To enhance nation's development should be one of the most important tasks of the medical and dental professions.<sup>2-4</sup>

The social problems can be classified into key areas with respect to disease conditions of adult medicine, dentistry, paediatrics and surgical problems cutting across Colleges of surgery and physicians.<sup>4</sup> In addition, research is the key to these solving these socio-economic challenges that will engender substantive building.<sup>3-5</sup>

Adult medicine and related challenges can further be classified into obstetric/gynaecology, surgery, psychiatry challenges, internal medicine, oncology which transcends multiple disciplines in medicine and dentistry and many others.<sup>6,7</sup>

As regards obstetrics/gynaecology maternal mortality, vesico-vaginal fistulae, teenage pregnancy/ unsafe abortion and preterm labour just to mention are a few of areas that are currently of high prevalence in Nigeria, and that may deter the social life of the country. As such, addressing them by medical professionals is critical to development.<sup>7-9</sup> Looking at the five leading causes of maternal mortality in Nigeria,<sup>10-13</sup> primary post-partum haemorrhage, pre-eclampsia/eclampsia, puerperal sepsis, complications of unsafe abortion and obstructed labour all of these cases have social undertones.<sup>7</sup> With regards to vesico-vaginal fistula, there are over 200,000 new cases that occur annually in the country that need

to be repaired.<sup>7</sup> Among the predisposing factors include the under-development of the pelvis due to young age, malnutrition and poverty.<sup>12</sup> Due to the stigmatization to VVF, affected women face a lot of social problems including loss of their babies, jobs, and sometimes husbands and in some cases they are ostracized from their communities.<sup>7</sup> There is therefore the need to reintegrate the victims back into the society, beginning with the the repair of the VVF which the medical professionals have a leading role to play.<sup>7</sup> Teenage pregnancy is still common in parts of Nigeria due to a good number of reasons cutting across religious and cultural grounds.<sup>8</sup> In addition, teenagers that get pregnant are stigmatized and socially deprived of a lot of amenities, including their potentials to drop out of school.<sup>8,9</sup> These have a lot of negative consequences socially and psychologically on the teenager.<sup>9</sup>

The patients with malignancies have myriads of social problems. An example is the high prevalence of cervical cancer in Nigeria due to paucity of organized screening programmes.<sup>13-14</sup> The overwhelming majority of these women tend to present late for treatment.<sup>14</sup> Apart from the medical complications associated with these conditions, they tend to be abandoned by husbands, relatives and sometimes left in hospitals for lack of funds to provide necessary care.<sup>5,14</sup> Breast cancer is ranked as the most common cancer among women in the world with increasing number of cases occurring in Nigeria. The challenge of abandonment and stigmatization also occur in women with breast cancer, especially because of the related high cost of treatment.<sup>14</sup> More cases of prostate cancer are being diagnosed in the advanced stages of the disease in Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> Complications arising from prostate cancer, may cause difficulty in walking due to metastasis to the lower limbs.<sup>15,16</sup> This may result in the deprivation of social amenities such as food and shelter just to mention a few. With men being the major bread economic providers for many Nigerian communities, this further compounds the social problems for most families in which the men are affected with prostate cancer.<sup>6,15</sup>

Social problems associated with mental health pathologies are on the increase. Some examples of which are depressive illnesses, suicide, rape and psychosis due to the harsh economic situation in the country.<sup>16</sup> Youths addicted to psychoactive drugs such as alcohol and hard drugs are also on the increase due to peer pressures and limited parental supervision.<sup>18</sup> In addition access to the internet has also engaged youths and young people in anti-social behavior such as pornography addiction with its negative social problems.<sup>17-18</sup>

There are a good number of paediatric challenges/problems which are directly or indirectly have social impacts.<sup>19,20</sup> For example perinatal/infant mortalities are still very high in Nigeria; these are indices used to measure the health/economic/political

advancement of a nation.<sup>21-23</sup> These indices are greatly influenced by the social lives of the mothers such as level of the education, literacy, poverty and public health awareness.<sup>21</sup> The medical team can play a role as advocates for social change in such circumstances. In addition, the government should be encouraged to empower the educationally disadvantaged.<sup>20</sup> Breastfeeding our babies is paramount in curbing a good number of social problems our babies/children may face in the short and long run, especially in improving the intelligent quotient of the children.<sup>24</sup> In addition breastfeeding also helps prevent the occurrence of communicable diseases example of which are diarrhea as well as non-communicable diseases such as asthma, obesity and diabetes.<sup>24-25</sup> Furthermore, breastfeeding reduces the incidence of ovarian and breast cancers for the mother.<sup>23-24</sup>

Politically, the medical professionals and dental surgeons have great roles to play with respect to country's socio-economic development. If good men do not participate in politics, then evil men will take over the political arena. Medical professionals are mostly good people, but the problem is that most have decided to confine their lives to the consulting rooms. It is high time medical professionals dictate the pace in nation building by actively participating in the politics of building the nation, by so doing we/they can address the following key areas:

- Implement policies in favour of safe motherhood and reproductive health, thereby reducing the incident of maternal and perinatal mortality.
- Advocate for organized screening methods as regards cervical cancer, breast cancer, dental malignancies and prostate cancer to mention but a few and as such reducing mortalities nationwide from these malignancies.
- Advocate against anti-social practices and harmful traditional practices by traditional birth attendants, passing of bills against teenage pregnancies and anti-social practices.
- Labour analgesia as fundamental right to every woman in labour.
- Awareness and use of family planning services across the nation to reduce the population explosion in the nation, which is putting a huge burden on the socio-economical challenges in the nation.
- Reviewing the law (1985) against assailants/perpetrators of rape across the nation as well as addressing the emerging trends of suicide in the nation.
- Setting in motion grants/funds for research especially in the medical/dental profession.
- Proper funding of the residency training and kick starting national health bill.
- The issue of security of health professionals should be immensely considered.
- Breastfeeding as a fundamental human right.

**In conclusion if the nation must experience socio-economic development, then the health team must be fully involved at all levels, local government, state government and federal levels of government. Examples of medical professionals that have contributed to socio-economic development of Nigeria are Prof. Olukoye Ransome-Kuti former Minister of Health of Nigeria pioneer of Primary Health Care, Dr Mimiko former Governor of Ondo State contributed to reduction of maternal mortality and Dr Peter Odili former Governor of Rivers State.**

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