

DOKITA: THE EARLY YEARS

SOYANNWO A.

Professor 'Biodun Soyannwo was the first Sub-editor and second Editor of the DOKITA Editorial Board

First, I wish to thank the editorial Board of DOKITA for inviting me to reflect on the early days of DOKITA, having now been in existence for four decades. I consider this a distinct privilege in what can be regarded as appropriate circumstances.

The choice of the name DOKITA generated an excitement which had many factors rolled into one - originality which produced an identity uniquely acceptable to a multi-ethnic/cultural society at a point in the history of our country when national political independence was as paramount as national unity. It seems intriguing that virtually all the sectors of the nation accept and understand DOKITA to refer to the Western trained medical practitioner as distinct from his traditional counterpart. It seems as if we all took a solemn vow to live up to this choice. Starting from the pioneer editor Moses Ilo, who was simply a tireless worker. His boundless enthusiasm did not spare any rank in the society - from the medical students right to the topmost citizen in the nation. How-else or who-else could get the then Governor-General of the nation, Sir James Robertson, to accept to be one of the three pioneer patrons of the journal and to write the first message of Goodwill to the very first issue of DOKITA. The other two patrons were no less than the Chairman of the University College Ibadan (UCI) Council, Sir Francis Ibiam and the Chairman, Board of Governors, University College Hospital, the late Chief, the Honourable, Sir Kofu Abayomi. If one ever thought that the first Goodwill message was a fluke, the similar message to the second issue (DOKITA No.2) and the first after independence was written by the legendary, Ogbuefi Nnambi Azikiwe, the first Nigerian Governor-General of independent Nigeria and later the first President of the Republic of Nigeria. Other prevailing factors must have contributed to the enthusiasm with which DOKITA was prosecuted in those early days. Among these are the following. The ultra-modern University College Hospital had just been commissioned (1956) by Queen Elizabeth II and the following year, the famous first set of clinical students to be trained for the degree of M.B.B.S. (London) were admitted. By October 1960 the famous 13 made history by becoming the first set of doctors to qualify Nigeria (See STOP PRESS, DOKITA No.1 p.10). The Stop Press clearly indicates that Dokita was already in print before the final examination results. On the 1st of the same month of October the Nation had gained independence from Britain. Timing the DOKITA I to coincide with these momentous events can only be attributed to the careful and deliberate planning by the Editorial Board under the invaluable guidance of our (the author was the first sub-editor to Moses Ilo) advisers. In particular, Prof. Ralph G. Hendrickse, as Chairman of the Board, was a staunch guiding force. What must be said for all of them in those days is that they gave the advice freely, provided the resources but they ensured that we did all the work. There was no room for patronising in any form. Some examples are relevant. In the preparation of one of the early papers (Some Aspects Traditional Therapy in Yorubaland: DOKITA 3), Prof. T.A. Lambo then of Aro Mental Hospital was consulted. He listened patiently to my ideas and was, as usual with him, quite encouraging. I expected him to suggest guide

lines for the project prosecution. Although enthusiastic, I had never carried out any research project. Instead, after an embarrassing silence, he simply asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" Caught unaware, but realising that I was being told not to expect any spoon feeding, I requested to interview some of the professor's traditional colleagues in the field of mental illness. His reputation in collaborating with this group of traditional doctors had impressed the international community and of course, most of us students. Without any hesitation, he simply asked me to report to him in Abeokuta the following Sunday. With one of my colleagues, Femi Sowemimo (now Professor of Surgery and former Provost of the College of Medicine, University of Lagos), by 9.30 a.m. we had arrived at Aro Mental Hospital on the appointed Sunday. At his residence, he simply looked out of the window and after welcoming us signalled to the driver of a waiting ambulance to take us to one of the traditional doctors, Chief Soyinka, as requested. The tremendous co-operation we had reflected the care that had been taken in preparing for the request of ordinary medical students. We were allowed to take photograph of patients and shrine. Interview was not only cordial but questions were answered in depth. Indeed, it was an exhausting but memorable experience facilitated by one of our greatest peers without patronising us.

At the illustration unit, it was the same "conspiracy" Mr. Frank Speed, medical photographer, did provide us with cameras, films and other appliances to enable us take reasonable pictures but we had to compose and take the pictures ourselves. When it came to producing the dummy copy of the journal, Mr. Doig Simmonds, the medical artist, was kind enough to give me instructions on how the galley proofs should be pasted on the board. He gave us all the materials required, access to his drawing boards and the studio but we had to burn the midnight oil to produce the copy in time to meet the slot scheduled for the journal in the Ibadan University Press. In those early days it was good apprenticeship spiced by educated self development. There were no calculators, word processors desktop publishers or computers.

After producing the dummy copy, there was hardly any role for the board until the final product came out for distribution. In other words whether or not we meet the scheduled date of production was entirely in the hands of the University Press. That we were able to keep our time table depended on Mr. (now Chief) Funmilayo; the University Press printer the invaluable co-operation of Mr. Harris then the Librarian/Press Manager (later The Principal of UCI). We realised that our job was, after all, just a students journals competing for a slot with much more crucial jobs for the University. Clearly, Chief Funmilayo (now retired and the Chairman/CEO of Wemilore Press Agbowo, Ibadan) and his boss identified with our vision, aspirations and objectives which were "... projecting the students perspective of Medical Education and complimenting existing medical literature ..." DOKITA remains eternal grateful to this duo and the entire establishment of the University Press for the support in those early days and to date.

In the letter inviting me to write this little piece, it would seem that the objective of those early days are still paramount - "WHO recognised student's medical journal ...dedicated to publishing current advances in the world of medicine, research findings, review articles and case studies." I can only presume that the students perspective and contribution to these objectives are still being pursued as vigorously as in those early days. It is not just by chance of fluke that the first paper in DOKITA, titled Nuclear Appendage in Polymorphs was by B.O. Osunkoya, then a VIth year medical student and was an original basic research. Apart from the above, it may be remarkable that a symposium "Can Malaria be eradicated in West Africa" organised by the Department of Social & Preventive Medicine UCI headed by Dr. Van de Wall was published in the early days of DOKITA (No.3;8-16). Apart from student participation which contributed radical suggestions like ".....legislative control of the use of insecticides on an international scale...By these measures chances of mosquito resistance to potent insecticides would be lessened." (Lantum); ".....the salary of public health doctors should be raised to serve as an incentive toward this unpopular but essential aspect of medical services: compulsory housemanship in public health should be enforced before registration and after registration there should be another compulsory year of public health." (Ogbonnaya), the DOKITA editorial on the symposium sums up "Whatever the problems involved, the answer (to the question) must be in the affirmative. A defeatist attitude will get us no where." All these remain relevant as of today.

At this symposium, the role of the government was judged to be pivotal in any exercise on malaria eradication. The vision and enthusiasm of the pioneers of Dokita seems justified in that 40 years later, in the year 2000 the Ministry of Health of the Federal Government of our country has finally decided to take

necessary steps "roll back malaria" and its devastating consequences in the country.

Still on DOKITA publishing students' perspective of medicine, one of the papers in those early days titled Some Aspects of Traditional Therapy in Yorubaland, written by a student (vide supra) would seem to have been ahead of its time. Apart from recording details of a few traditional herbal preparation with their botanical names and publishing the photograph of some of traditional surgical instruments, the paper was "... a timely reminder to us all to re-orientate our attitude of thought to the traditional doctor and indeed to re-examine our ideas on the philosophical aspects of medical practice" (Editorial by RGH). DOKITA has every right to walk tall among the current medical publications on the now universal acceptance that the "secrets" of the rain forest must not only be tapped but must be jealously guarded and saved from destruction. Once again, nearly 40 years after this publication which advocated "drawing the traditional doctor closer to the mainstream medical practice (as Prof. T.A. Lambo had done for psychiatry), our Federal Government... "Plans to establish a Herbal Medical Council with the responsibility of setting a code of conduct for practitioners....." (The Guardian: 6th June, 2000; page 6). The existing liberty for any body who claims to have expertise to practise traditional medicine has only allowed the incompetent but loud to exploit the gullible public. Nevertheless, it is a start and DOKITA does wish the ministry of health a speedy execution of this important task.

Finally, it should be said that, in those days funds were not made available directly to us for running the journal but virtually all necessary resources were provided. This, no doubt must be why we did not have to organise dinners and other fund raising activities.