

# REMINISCENCE WITH A VIEW TO RENAISSANCE

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*"Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future,  
and time future contained in time past" <sup>1(p130)</sup>*

*T. S. Eliot*

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
which, taken at the flood leads on to fortune" <sup>1(p326)</sup>*

*William Shakespeare*

*"Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time" <sup>1(p190)</sup>*

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

Four decades ago, a group of visionary medical students decided that "enough does happen in, and emanate from this institution to need that reports be made, for our successors as a record of our findings, progress and ideas and to our contemporaries, for record and exchange."<sup>2</sup> With this in mind they conceived and presented our own medical students' journal, DOKITA, with the vision that "through it and in it we may arouse, terrify, teach, comfort and open our hearts to each other as brothers!"<sup>2</sup> Today, what began as tiny rays of light has become a glowing beacon that adds to the illumination of our medical terrain in its own modest way.

As we look back and celebrate forty years of hard-won accomplishment, we also look forward to enlarging our coasts and breaking new ground in the years ahead. This article will endeavour to chronicle some of the lasting and enduring moments that helped shape the just concluded decade (the preceding decades have been covered by my distinguished predecessors). I also hope it will serve as a source of inspiration and direction for our successors. I am indeed honoured by this invitation to reminisce with a view to invoking a new DOKITA Renaissance!

The DOKITA decade of the 90's opened with the production of the landmark "Recent Advances in Neurosciences" (RAINS) edition which though conceived by Babirefe Vite (Editor-in-Chief 1988/89), received ante-natal supervision under Charles Mbonu (Editor-in Chief 1989/90) and was eventually delivered by the forthright and versatile Benedict Alagh<sup>3</sup> (Editor-in Chief 1990/91). Excellent articles from a wide range of neuroscientific disciplines—basic neurosciences, clinical neurology, neurosurgery, neuropsychiatry, paediatric neurology, neuroradiology—were contributed by consultant staff with only one student article on craniosynostosis by Gabriel Uwaifo. This dearth of student contribution was corrected in the next edition, which focused on the "Parasitoses". Over half of the papers published were student-authored. The Editorial Board at that time under the able leadership of Conrad Cole revived the annual essay competition in a bid to encourage and improve the art of scientific writing among medical students<sup>4</sup>. The response was quite encouraging and the winning entry was published in the journal<sup>5</sup>, a tradition that has continued to date. The Board also instituted the DOKITA Quiz Competition between the various classes in the medical school 'as a means of promoting general knowledge and intellect among the student populace'.<sup>6</sup>

Although I had bought issues of DOKITA and attended the public functions of her Editorial Board since 1990, my first real insight into the workings of the Board came in September 1992 (while still in preclinical school) when I passed through the thorough selection process for which the Board is still known. My first impressions of a group of highly disciplined and result-oriented young men and women dedicated to exhibiting excellence in a unique milieu of friendship and familial camaraderie still remain with me today. My Editor-in Chief, 'Lanre Ogunyemi was a gentle martial artist who masterfully combined firmness with fairness. He schooled us in the three D's of DOKITA—Discipline, Dedication and Diligence—that ensured that DOKITA remained the Synonym of Distinction.

Personally, my fledgling commitment to the DOKITA family got encased in reinforced concrete just a month after my admission "on Board". I will always remember my surprise, delight and pride on returning to my room in Independence Hall, UI after a tiring session of Anatomy dissection to find a birthday card endorsed with various comments by virtually every member of the Board. From then on, in my eyes, the Board could and still can do no wrong. My duties that year were mainly in the Distribution, News & Quiz and Publicity departments. The unassuming and thorough 'Kunle Ojemakinde, the articulate and brilliant 'Tola Kolawole and the inspiring and versatile Victor Kolade as respective heads of these departments helped me maximise my potential by giving me challenging assignments. The journal that year was devoted to "Maternal and Child Health" and boasted of superb student papers that constituted about a half of the publications. The edition was dedicated to our outgoing Board Chairman, Professor J. A. Adeleye whose guardianship and versatility had seen DOKITA through many troubled waters.<sup>7</sup> The essay competition was also named after him.

At the end of the Board year, the mantle of leadership fell on veteran administrator and disciplinarian Olumide Sogaolu who strove not just to maintain but improve upon the standards set by our predecessors. I was elected to serve in the new Executive Council as the News & Quiz Editor and quickly had to adjust to the new responsibilities. I remember the first business trip we had as executives. Under the direction of Shadrack Aisuodionoe, the Business Manager, we went to Lagos to visit pharmaceutical companies in areas as far apart as Agidingbi in Ikeja and Agbara on the way to Badagry. Starting at the toll-gate we were dropped off in pairs at various locations and given times to report back to those spots to be picked up. It was a worthwhile baptism that I am grateful for as I quickly had to learn to speak convincingly to



the Marketing Managers of various companies and soon became adept at it. Following the visionary leadership of the Editor-in-Chief, I also had to spearhead the organisation of the symposium on "Road Traffic Accidents".<sup>8</sup>

The academic session was disrupted by strikes and the production of the journal was delayed. Even while at home the drive to work for the Board was so potent that I began going to various hospitals all over Lagos to sell back issues. When DOKITA Volume 22 Number 1 was finally produced in May 1995, it was tagged a "General Edition" and had multiple foci with articles on renal medicine and road traffic accidents amongst others.<sup>9</sup> The Board decided to stop publishing adverts on the front cover and called for designs by members. The Renfrew font was accepted by the Board for the DOKITA typeface and has since become a permanent fixture on our publications, although the cover pages have been progressively improved upon since then.

Next came the tenure of the innovative and doggedly persistent Olayiwola Ajileye as Editor-in-Chief. I was re-elected for a second term as News & Quiz Editor and once again had the opportunity to organise the symposium and quiz competition, and we made improvements based on the experiences of the previous year. The symposium focused on "Mental Health in Nigeria" and was aptly tagged "The Veil of Sanity". The Editor-in-Chief came up with the idea of elevating the quiz competition to an inter-disciplinary status in a bid to foster unity and composite knowledge amongst the health-related disciplines.<sup>10</sup> We decided to christen the competition after Emeritus Professor O. O. Akinkugbe in recognition of his invaluable leadership and immeasurable contributions to the Board as our longest-serving and most eminent Editorial Consultant.

DOKITA Volume 23 Number 1, the "Hepatology Edition" was published in "collaboration" with the National Association for the Study of the Liver<sup>11</sup> and drew experts papers from within and outside Ibadan. Student articles accounted for only a third of the publications. Due to some internal differences on production modalities, what should have been a masterpiece considering all the effort invested into getting the articles, was not quite so as some articles were not published and others had significant portions either missing or wrongly placed. Nonetheless the output was fairly good and commended by majority of the reading populace. Professor E. O. Otolorin, our Deputy Board Chairman was a strong pillar of support. His efforts were all the more glaring because both the Chairman, Professor O. G. Ajao and the Faculty Adviser, Dr. A.O. Akanji were out of the country and he himself was on official assignment in Abeokuta.

*"An author who speaks about his own books is almost as bad as a mother who talks about her children"*<sup>1(p122)</sup>

*Benjamin Disraeli*

Waves of nostalgia and undying memories of exploits continue to resonate in my mind whenever I think of the 1996/97 Board Year. I was elected Editor-in-Chief in February 1997 and decided that our thrust would be improvement in every way possible, I was blessed with a wonderful Executive Council of dynamic leaders and a DOKITA family committed to ensuring that the noble investment of our "heroes and sheroes" past would not have been in vain. At the risk of indulging in self

praise, I shall endeavour to chronicle our modest achievements that year.

Our symposium focused on "Reproductive Health in Nigeria" and because the topic touches on that span the whole spectrum of life from before we are born till after we are gone, we chose the caption "Before, During and After"<sup>12</sup> (BDA). The symposium was supported by various bodies and persons including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). We decided to publish the proceedings of the symposium in book form for two reasons—to have a permanent record of what ensued and to experiment with our innovative ideas for the journal design and outlay. I am grateful to have had a most uniquely gifted and understanding Production Manager in L-J. C. Anyanwu. It was an exercise well worth the effort and the lessons garnered stood us in good stead during the production of DOKITA Volume 24 Number 1.

During the Board year we made several infra-structural changes that helped increase our output. A major goal of the executive year was that everyone on Board should have the opportunity to maximise their potential and we did not hesitate to demand the best each one had to offer. Many have said I was a hard taskmaster; that may have been true but to a large extent firmness was blended with fairness. We appointed new Editorial Consultants and elevated Emeritus Professor O. O. Akinkugbe to the newly created position of Emeritus Consultant. We also appointed the versatile and student-friendly Mr. T. O. Alonge, FRCS, himself a former DOKITA Editor-in-Chief as our Faculty Adviser. In addition, we set up a Professor O. O. Akinkugbe Endowment Fund that would ensure that the quiz competition was run in perpetuity. The idea of celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary was also conceived that year and we began the initial groundwork.

Our journal edition contained a rich cornucopia of articles drawn from the specialties of Ophthalmology, Otorhinolaryngology, Dermatology, Psychiatry and Anaesthesia. It was tagged the "Clinical Specialties Edition". In preparation for production we revised our "Instructions to Authors" in accordance with the "Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals" (The Vancouver Style)<sup>13</sup> available to us at the time. We also implemented and improved upon the innovations we experimented with while producing the BDA proceedings. We published coloured photographs for the first time and these alongside the superb articles (a third student-authored) made that diet a veritable compendium of medical information.<sup>14</sup>

In all it was largely a year of exploits and triumphs although we had our fair share of blunders. I will always remember a particular judgement call made during the selection process and retrospectively I think we should have published the BDA proceedings as a supplement to the journal rather than as a separate publication. I will always be grateful to God for every opportunity I had to serve the Board. Many kind comments have since been made about our achievements that Board year but I must say that it was the unique DOKITA family that possessed the lion heart; I merely had the privilege to give the roar!



*"It is good to kill an admiral from time to time,  
to encourage the others."* <sup>1(p397)</sup>

Voltaire

It has been interesting and rewarding to stand on the sidelines and watch the Board make tremendous progress. My successor, the discerning and well-rounded Sunmolu Shoyinka and his team not only completed unfinished projects from the previous year, they also made giant strides of their own. "The Dancing Quill", a collection of selected speeches and quotes of our eminent sage, Emeritus Professor Akinkugbe<sup>15</sup> was a project conceived by L-J. C. Anyanwu during my tenure to raise funds for the Akinkugbe Endowment Fund but executed during Shoyinka's time. The production of Paediatrics Grand Round IV was also completed. The second edition of the Quiz competition and the 1998 DOKITA symposium on "Preserving The Future: Child care in the Tropics" were held that year with greater success. They also commenced the ground work for obtaining a personal computer to ease the production burden of the Board. The Constitution was also reviewed during the Board year. They crowned their efforts with the production of DOKITA Volume 25 Number 1 which attracted articles from Nigeria and overseas on cancer<sup>16</sup>, was tagged the "Oncology Edition" and remains the largest volume published to date.

*"I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman,  
but I have the heart and stomach of a King,  
and of a King of England"* <sup>1(p132)</sup>

Elizabeth I of England

The next Board year saw the emergence of Abimbola Otelaja as the first female Editor-in-Chief of DOKITA. She had displayed her leadership qualities right from when she was admitted during my tenure, being my Sub-editor for the "Clinical Specialties Edition", a duty she discharged so well that she left no one in doubt of her place in history. Her mature and astute leadership brought the Board great fortune. The 1999 symposium on "Infectious Diseases in Nigeria" tagged "Target 2000: Man and Microbes, Who is winning?" was sponsored by the World Health Organisation and the proceedings were published.<sup>17</sup> Her team also obtained a personal computer for the Board and published the revised Constitution. DOKITA Volume 26 Number 1 had input from all over the country on various aspects of the "Heart and Lungs".<sup>18</sup> At the tail end her tenure she displayed her unique sense of judgement in the choice of the new dynamic Advisory Board of Professor Jaiye Thomas, Professor A. O. Omigbodun and Mr. Tope Alonge, FRCS as the Board Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Faculty Adviser respectively.

This year under the visionary leadership of Oladunni Filani, the Board has continued in the tradition of excellence for which it is known. When the idea of celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we prayed for a dynamic team that would plan the celebrations in best of DOKITA traditions. You couldn't have asked for a better team than this fine crop of achievers to do the job. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary is taking the form of an International Students' Conference on "Medical Education in the Developing World". The quiz competition has attained national status and the Board has only recently acquired a second personal computer to further smoothen her operations.

*"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:*

*It's loveliness increases;  
it will never pass into nothingness"* <sup>1(p181)</sup>

John Keats

It remains for me to sing my Spero Meliora<sup>14</sup> song once again. As I gaze into the future, I behold tomorrow bright before us like a flame. There are no limits to the triumphs that await DOKITA and her Editorial Board. We must cultivate a discontent with everything that is common in ourselves. We must refuse to be satisfied with anything but one hundred plus. We must continue to develop our leadership skills and our technology. The selection process should remain thorough and discerning and the ideals of personal development should be further entrenched in every Board activity and in the overall Board strategy.

There is a need to encourage greater student participation in the journal. Our teachers should encourage and place greater premium on rewarding excellence as this will spur budding scientists and achievers to greater heights. There is a need to re-engineer the curriculum to include the liberal arts, laboratory research work and information technology. I personally advocate for the return of the intercalated Bachelor of Medical Science program for interested outstanding students after their MBBS Part I or Part II as this will foster original thought and innovative projects, the results of which can be published in DOKITA. That was after all the original intent of her founding fathers. Elective postings should be just that: elective! Students should be able to choose where they want to spend them (with adequate supervision, of course). Promising students with research interests should be able to choose to spend the two months of their elective posting in the laboratory or on the field, if they so wish, learning research techniques and carrying out small meaningful projects. Student projects during the rural Igbo-Ora postings assessed to be groundbreaking and/or outstanding by their supervisors could be recommended for publishing in the journal; even individual unsponsored work could also be sent in for assessment and possible publication. I am sure some members of the student populace would jump at these opportunities and maximise them. The changes proposed will not only breed a new generation of potential Nobel Laureates, it will also serve as a wake-up call for our present crop of academics.

*"Your manuscript is both good and original. Unfortunately,  
what is original is not good, and what is good is not  
original"* <sup>19</sup>

Samuel Johnson

I see the Board sailing in the waters of electronic publishing (with its attendant challenges) and setting up more efficient and effectively-run editorial processes. Hands-on experience in matters of editing, proofreading, proper referencing, typesetting and printing should be further encouraged. Instructions to Authors should be strictly followed and I daresay that articles that do not measure up to standard even if they were invited should be rejected. We should strive to publish what is scientifically worthwhile and original while simultaneously providing continuing education. It is high time DOKITA regained her place on the Index Medicus and got cited in MEDLINE and the Science Citation Index as well.

The Distribution network of DOKITA needs to be



strengthened. Links with other medical schools within and outside Nigeria should be forged and reinforced. Help in this regard from the Alumni, the teaching staff as well as the student population is essential. DOKITA is forty years old and its continued production and distribution should be our collective responsibility. I advocate for the possible establishment of a Trust Fund whose monies would be wisely invested and dividends channelled into the production of the journal rather than continue to have launching ceremonies for every publication year. This will not only ensure perpetuity, it will also ensure some degree of subsidy for the Ibadan medical student and his counterparts in other parts of the world. In conclusion, let us all commit ourselves to a re-enactment in contemporary times, and by men of his calibre, of the words of Dr. Ian Douglas-Wilson, a former editor of The Lancet who once commented on DOKITA as follows:

*"Now that I have read the latest issue,  
I can only reiterate my congratulations—  
I don't myself know of a better student journal anywhere!"*<sup>22</sup>

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