



Thirty-Two Teeth, Thirty-Two Challenges: Memoirs of a Dentist Turned Policy Maker

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According to Eleanor Roosevelt, *“memoirs are only useful as the lives you read about and analyse may suggest to you something that you may find useful in your own journey through life.”* I am therefore glad to state that I see myself quite relevant to Nigeria’s quest for greatness, particularly in the health sector. This belief fueled my resolve to scale the hurdles every step of the way with the help of God. I thank the leadership of the Nigerian Dental Association (NDA) for the honour of sharing my story with my colleagues on this platform. There is a generational and professional hand-holding gesture that I presume the NDA would like to crystalize by requesting I pen down this memoir. It is indeed a reminiscence of my days of persuasion to preparation and to the stepwise progression towards making valuable contributions to policy making in the Nigerian health sector. While this write-up narrates in brief some dimensions of my journey through the hallway of life and career, it would highlight my movement from the first encounter with Nigeria’s health sector as a young dentist to an administrative icon and health policy specialist leading change implementation and institutional reform processes over three decades.

This memoir chronicles the journey of my intellectual development, from secondary school to the University, as well as the entire trajectory of my professional coming of age and maturity. This is buttressed by my devotion to understanding the Nigerian project and assembling the credentials and competencies to find ways and means by which to contribute to making Nigeria work positively for Nigerians.

After my secondary education at Remo Secondary School, Sagamu in 1979 and Higher School Certificate at the Federal Government College, Odo-ogbolu in 1981, I bagged a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) Degree at the University of Ibadan, in 1986. After a stint at a private Dental Clinic in 1988, my career in the public service began as a Dental Officer II at the Federal Dental Clinic, Broad Street, Lagos and after completing a training Course sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), I was conferred with Diploma in Clinical Dentistry by the Kyushu University, Japan in 1993. I had my Master’s Degree in Health Planning and Management from the University of Benin in 1995 and was awarded a Certificate in Healthcare Financing by Boston University, USA in 1998 as well as Diploma in Health Systems Management by Galilee College, Israel

in 2008. I participated in the 10-month intensive Senior Executive Course at the prestigious National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru where I was awarded Membership of the National Institute (mni) in November 2013.

My drive for nation building saw me organizing and participating in several national and international conferences and seminars on oral health as well as Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health plus Nutrition. I served as a Member of the Partnership Council of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and was the Alternate to the Honourable Minister of Health on the Board of the Global Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health for three years. Furthermore, I represented Nigeria in international discourse on several occasions, including: the World Health Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland; Women Deliver Conference, Vancouver, Canada; Health Systems Strengthening and Sustainable Financing Course, World Bank Headquarters, Washington D.C.; International Conference on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition Johannesburg, South Africa; Family Planning 2020 Reference Group Meeting, Dar es Salam, Tanzania, September, 2016; International Nutrition Stakeholders' Conference, Cancun, Mexico; Launch of Global Quality of Care Network on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, at Lilongwe, Malawi; African Union Commission Committee Meeting on Youth, Health and Development (Representative of the

Honourable Minister of Health), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Health Management Information Systems, CLG, London, UK; Health Systems Management (Diploma), Galilee College, Israel, Forces of Change: New Strategies for the Evolving Health Care Marketplace; Executive Education Program at Harvard School of Public Health; FDI World Annual Dental Congress; among others.

Buoyed by my career goal - to use my God-given prowess for the transformation of inefficient systems to internationally acceptable performance standards pivoted on cost-effective models-my career progression traversed sundry areas of the Nigerian healthcare delivery system, including general dental practice, healthcare financing, manpower development, coordination and supervision of Federal Tertiary Health Institutions. Along my career path, I actively participated in policy formulation to leverage the development of oral health and health service delivery. I rose to the position of Head, Dentistry Division, Federal Ministry of Health/Chief Dental Officer for Nigeria in November 2009. After acting as the Director, Hospital Services Department from May-June 2016, I was appointed as Head, Family Health Department in July, 2016 (the first Dentist to head the Department), a position I held until February 2020 when I was posted back as the substantive Director/Head, Department of Hospital Services, Federal Ministry of Health. I held the position from February 2020 until I retired in October 2022. Upon my deployment as Director Hospital



Services (the first Dentist to occupy the position), I swung into action by setting in motion the processes for the institutionalization of best practices in quality of care in Federal Tertiary Health Institutions through reactivation of Hospital Standards Committees, review of service delivery protocols and standardization of the selection of Chief Executives of Federal Tertiary Hospitals for effective delivery of their mandates. I chaired the Cancer Health Fund Steering Committee and the National Surgical, Obstetrics, Anaesthesia & Nursing Plan Implementation Committee. I also served as the **National Team Lead of the Case Management Pillar of the Presidential Task Force and Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 from the date of the index case in March 2020 until my retirement in October 2022.**

My patriotism and passion for Nigeria fostered numerous notable contributions to the Nigerian health sector. These include: negotiation for the donation of 8nos Dental Chairs and accessories (costing millions of Naira) from the Goldman School of Dentistry, Boston University, USA, during my training on Health Care Financing at the Institution in 1998 and I personally negotiated for the sponsorship of the shipment of the equipment by the Yoruba Community of Massachusetts to the tune of \$3,500. I persistently followed up the import duty waiver from the Presidency and eventual clearing of the equipment at the Lagos Sea Port through the Federal Ministry of Transport and the Nigerian Customs Service (from December 1998 to

August 2001). The Dental Chairs were subsequently distributed to Federal and State Government Clinics in Lagos (Federal Staff Hospital, Victoria Island), Ogun (Government Dental Centre, Sagamu), Imo (General Hospital Owerri), Kaduna (Federal Staff Clinic, Kaduna), Kano (Federal Staff Clinic, Kano), Sokoto (General Hospital Sokoto) and Borno (Dental Hospital, Maiduguri) states and the FCT (Federal Staff Dental Clinic, Abuja) as assistance towards the delivery of primary oral health care.

Furthermore, I organized and effectively ran the first ever Dental Clinic at an International Games held in Nigeria i.e. the 8th All Africa Games (COJA held in Abuja in October 2003). The organization and running of the Clinic was judged excellent by the Medical Team of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). I also served as a Member/Secretary of several Ministerial Administrative/Investigative Committees. These include: Committees on Alleged Maladministration and Financial Misappropriation in some Federal Tertiary Health Institutions, Reform Management Team, Committee on the Personnel and Equipment Audit/Evaluation of Fixed Assets of the Federal Medical Centre, Ebute-Metta, Lagos (in preparation for the take-over from Nigerian Railway Corporation by the Federal Ministry of Health), Committee on the Determination of Severance Package for Chief Executives of Federal Tertiary Health Institutions, among others.



Determined to leverage my expertise for the improvement of oral healthcare delivery in the country, I recommended setting up a Ministerial Expert Committee for the Development of the National Oral Health Care Policy in 2001-2004 and I served as the Team Lead for the finalization of the National Oral Health Policy in 2012, culminating in the approval by the National Council on Health and the Federal Executive Council. The policy document was subsequently endorsed by the National Economic Council in 2012. I served as a Member of the Accreditation Team of the Medical & Dental Council of Nigeria for the accreditation / re-accreditation of: School of Dentistry, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria – Dec. 2010; State House Medical Centre, Abuja (for training of House Officers)–June 2011; School of Dentistry, University of Lagos, Nigeria – May 2012; Served as the Representative of the Federal Ministry of Health and a Member of Boards of Management of Federal Tertiary Institutions/ Regulatory Bodies including Dental Technologists Registration Board of Nigeria, (2000 – 2003), Federal School of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu (2001 – 2003), Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital, Enugu (2005 – 2007), Federal Medical Centre, Asaba (2007 – 2009), Intercountry Centre for Oral Health, Jos (2011 – 2013), Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (2010 – 2015 & 2020 to date), University of Abuja Teaching Hospital May – Sept 2011; University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu (2018 – 2019), Federal Medical Centre, Ebute-Metta,

Lagos (October 2019 till retirement in October 2022).

I must point out that though I encountered several challenges in my odyssey from being a dentist to an astute policy maker, it also came with some commendations and honors including: Ministerial Award for outstanding performance and commitment to the goals of the Federal Ministry of Health – a recognition of hard work and dedication. I was awarded Membership of the prestigious National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Nigeria as well as Fellowship of the International College of Dentists to mention a few.

From my humble background and experience, I believe that there's absolutely no limit to the height any dentist who is determined could attain once there's appropriate persuasion, propelled by adequate preparation for a stellar career as a policy maker. All these could not have happened without the enabling power of God Almighty and the immeasurable support of my dear family, wonderful staff everywhere I served and sundry colleagues too numerous to mention.