

MEDICAL & DENTAL COUNCIL OF NIGERIA REACTS TO POOR MEDICAL TRAINING; A ROOT CAUSES ANALYSIS.

The news of the barring of great University of Benin (Uniben) College of Medical sciences graduates from registration with the Nigerian Medical & Dental Council came as a shock to many alumni of the university especially those who passed through that medical school. Only a couple of years ago UNIBEN alumni were all rejoicing that UNIBEN came up as the best University in Nigeria.

In a statement in Benin on the 21st of February 2008 by Mr. Eddy Akporere, Head Public Relations and Protocol said that the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities released in January, 2008, showed that University of Benin maintained its first position in Nigeria, in the past one year.

He added that the new World Universities' Ranking has again placed University of Benin, Benin City ahead of all Nigerian Federal, State and Private Universities in terms of global visibility, in terms of researches and academic programmes.

The announcement by Professor Roger Makanjuola of the Medical & Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) de-accrediting the College of Medical Sciences of the University of Benin, Benin City did not only shock some of us but was very demoralising considering that only a couple of years ago UNIBEN was voted the best university in Nigeria; how did this sudden fall from grace to grass happen?

Professor Roger Makanjuola himself a medical doctor and professor of psychiatry would not have taken the decision lightly as the current chairman of the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria especially as he himself knows what it feels like for an accreditation to be withdrawn from a faculty or college as he was the ViceChancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife when the faculty accreditation for the faculty of law was withdrawn by the National University Commission NUC in January 2006.

Professor Roger Makanjuola is a man who may be keen for the best standard of care for Nigerians and more importantly keen to maintain the standard of medical training and practice in Nigeria. We all recall his road show in the USA seeking support from well placed alumni of OAU Ile Ife to come home to support their university so it is difficult to ascribe politics into the decision on great UNIBEN.

Is this therefore a case of the University of Benin authority affronting the MDCN's earlier decision of refusing the Niger Delta University accreditation for its medical training and Uniben authorities stepping over to assist the young university and taking the fall? One can only guess.

One cannot fault MDCN of Nigeria for their punitive action against university medical schools in Nigeria as the practice of medicine has actually deteriorated like everything else in the country but this sorry state of affairs is unfortunately not limited to only Uniben. How has the great Uniben been pulled down from its Olympian heights as the best university in Nigeria to be de-accredited in medicine where as an institution it has made a great impact nationally and internationally.

Reading through the suspension letter signed by Dr. A. A. Ibrahim, Registrar of MDCN, *'the Council wishes to reassert that the issue at stake is the unsatisfactory and inadequate training of students who shall be licensed as doctors to treat the citizens of this country based on the visitation panel report to MDCN. However Council would be ready to pay an accreditation visit to the College of Medical Sciences within the next twelve (12) months, on an appropriate date in 2011, if the University authorities invite such a visitation'*

The statutory functions of the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria is to approve the institutions at which courses of training are to be given for persons who are seeking to become members of the Medical and Dental professions as well as the courses of instruction prescribed and the qualifications to be granted by such institutions.

Council also has the responsibility for supervising the nature of the instructions and the examinations leading to the qualifications to be granted in these cases (vide Medical and Dental Practitioners Decree No. 23 of 1988, Sections I (2a), 8(I a & b) and 9 (1, 3 & 4), after several reviews, the enabling Act is now CAP M8.

In pursuance of these duties, the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria sends visitation panels from time to time to inspect newly established medical schools with a view to approving formally their training programmes as required by the law but UNIBEN is a first generation university in Nigeria and would have had series of such inspection and would have been a grand master in getting the college of medical sciences of the University of Benin ready for such accreditation and re-accreditation so what went wrong?

The story is that the University of Benin a few years ago was approached by the Niger Delta University College of Health Sciences Wilberforce Island, Amassoma, Yenogao; Bayelsa State of Nigeria to assist with the training of her medical students as her College of Health sciences was not accredited for medical students training. The then VC of the University of Benin agreed as this was a common practice amongst Nigerian universities usually between a well established

universitylike Uniben and an upcoming university as the Niger Delta University who had its first intake in 2002.

If you recall the first intake pre-clinical science students of the University of Benin were trained at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, while the first intake pharmacy students were trained at the University of Ife.

In the same vein, the University of Benin also trained Bendel State University now Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma until they became fully fleshed to produce their own medical graduates. This kind of support and co-operation between Nigerian universities is what is essential to make Nigeria grow as a nation and give support to newer universities but standards must be kept at all cost by those whose duty statutorily it is to keep them like the MDCN, the National University Commission and the Senate of the various universities.

It was this addition of the medical students from the Niger Delta University Bayelsa State which took the number of medical students allowed for Uniben above the acceptable limit for students' faculty ratio and the ratio of students to infrastructure and equipments. There may be other factors detected by the visitation panel but it seems the crux was the disproportionate ratio of students to staff. This same problem will be detected in other Nigerian universities as they are all usually guilty of admitting too many students above the quota approved for each institution so the commissioning authorities for Federal, State and Private Universities must put resources in place to provide adequate faculty, equipments and infrastructure for producing medical doctors fit for purpose of providing healthy living and preventing ill health amongst Nigerians.

The need for maintaining standard cannot be over emphasised and similarly the morale of the students, and faculty members of the University of Benin Medical School must be maintained so this issue needs urgent resolution so that appropriate infrastructure, necessary equipments and adequate number of staff must be quickly put in place so that a new visitation panel will give the medical school the acceptable minimum standard so that this de-accreditation can be lifted.

The quick fix options will be to send the Niger Delta medical students back to Bayelsa State as suggested in some quarters. This will obviously be very inappropriate and an unpopular option as the students have spent between one to three years in the medical school and are at the stage of graduation so every

effort should be made to see that they graduate with minimal delay and disturbance as they have not caused any of these current crises.

There is no doubt the standard of Nigerian medical schools have fallen over these years and visitation panel if sent to other similar university will come back with sorry tales of same situation as found.

The best option will be for the Federal Government to intervene through the Federal Ministry of Health and or Education by voting an emergency fund to support Uniben Medical School so that it can meet the minimum standard of the MDCN. Special plea should be made to President Goodluck Jonathan to facilitate this emergency vote for upgrading the medical colleges not only in Benin but in Yenogao as well after all the Niger Delta University he contributed in setting up is at the middle of the current crisis.

In subsequent years the Federal Government should vote adequate funds for the maintenance of her universities to bring them to international standard and save the MDCN and other regulating bodies the problem of incessant intervention and unnecessary adverse publicity which is not good for the universities, the students, Nigerians and even the regulating bodies.

It may be difficult to blame the conduct of Nigerian medical graduates on their training institutions because they were admitted from amongst Nigerians who believe in get rich quick, who sees the way the politicians are squandering the resources of the nation, who see the lack of transparency, lack of accountability and lack of integrity amongst the ruling class so total re-orientation of our people is needed but we have to start from somewhere. As a child growing up in Benin, medical doctors were the heart and soul of the community as they were respected so it is only fair the re-orientation of the Nigerian society should start amongst doctors to show exemplary character, conduct and behaviour.

Our countrymen needs a re-orientation not just the medical graduates alone and efforts like this to bring sanity into the polity should be applauded but suffering of the innocent medical students should not be prolonged so as not to throw the proverbial baby away with the dirty bath water so we appeal to the MDCN through its chair person Professor Roger Makanjuola to temper justice with mercy and give the College of Medical sciences of the University a probation of about a twelve

months period while they put their house in order. The Nigerian President must act quickly to redeem the situation as the current father of the nation to obviate the current adverse publicity which is not good for the nation as University of Benin is one of the national flag bearer in academics, research and in the industry.

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