

OBITUARY

Olabisi Adebayo Odejide

(1941 – 2007)



The small but distinguished group of psychiatrists in Nigeria who could be described as belonging to the second generation of that profession (after the generation of T. A. Lambo) was composed of outstanding members who blazed several trails in clinical practice, academic, administration, and policy making. A few of them even ventured into politics. Professor Olabisi Adebayo Odejide was an exemplar of the group. His foray into diverse areas of activity and his ability to make a mark in most was a reflection of the qualities that so clearly characterized several members of that group.

Born in a small town of Iresi, in Osun State of Nigeria, his roots probably belie the accomplishments that were later to characterize his life. As many people of his age, he was raised in a polygamous home and the spirit of hard work and striving to excel must have been nurtured by the dynamics of that family background. Many offspring of polygamous homes often find the competitive sibling engagement of their childhood the springboard for robust character development and later success in the outside world.

After completing his medical education at the University of Ibadan in 1968 and his housemanship at the Adeoyo State Hospital - also in Ibadan - the following year, he made an early choice to pursue a career in psychiatry. He was a resident in psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at the University College Hospital, Ibadan between August 1969 and August 1970. Like a number of his peers at the time wishing to specialize in psychiatry, he proceeded for further training in Edinburgh, Scotland in September 1970. When he returned to Nigeria in 1984, he had secured the Diploma in Psychiatry (DPM) of the University of Edinburgh as well as the Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He was appointed Lecturer/Consultant in the Department of Psychiatry at his alma mater in August 1974 and thereby began a career in academic psychiatry. His early research interests included psychopharmacology and clinical studies of schizophrenia. Those familiar with his later research interests in the use and misuse of alcohol may not realise that his MD, obtained in 1975, was based on a study of the clinical features (including medication side effects) of a sample of patients with chronic schizophrenia on long hospitalization. He was the author of over 110 scientific papers and made presentations at various national and international conferences. He remained active in research and though he had retired formally from the University in October 2006, he had continued as an Honorary Adjunct Professor until his death.

He was one of the earliest academic psychiatrists in Africa to recognize the need to focus research attention on the epidemiology of substance use and associated problems. He

soon became active in the activities of the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA), participating in its workshops in Nigeria and engaging in research projects sponsored by the Council. His interest in the area was rewarded with his appointment as the pioneer Director of the Demand Reduction Unit of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the first major national initiative to tackle drug-related problems in the country. Even though the NDLEA was conceptualized as a legal outfit for dealing with drug trafficking, Olabisi continually worked to broaden the remit of the organization, emphasizing the need to focus on reducing the abuse of drugs by Nigerians through enlightened medical and social approaches.

He became a professor of psychiatry in October 1991. He subsequently held various positions within the University, being at various times the Head of the Department of Psychiatry, the Dean of the Faculty of Clinical Sciences and Dentistry and later the Director of the Institute of Advanced Medical Research and Training. One of his achievements in the latter position was his successful effort to get the University to change the name of the Institute from that of Postgraduate Institute of Medical Research and Training to its current name. His argument in support of the change was that it was necessary if the Institute was ever going to achieve a semi-autonomous status that would enhance its chances of drawing direct funding from the government and improve its chances of meeting its laudable goals. Such astuteness was emblematic of his administrative positions. When he held the position of Chair of the Oyo State Health Management Board, he was instrumental in convincing the state government of the need to establish a unit for psychiatry at the State Hospital and the construction of a 34-bed ward, a development that remains unmatched in several state-run general hospitals in Nigeria, to this day. In more recent years, he served as the Chief Medical Director at the Ladoke Akintola University Teaching Hospital. Here again, he worked tirelessly for the establishment of a department of psychiatry. Probably, nothing exemplified his ability to strike a chord with policy makers than his appointment as the Secretary to the Oyo State Government from December 1982 to September 1983. Anyone familiar with the challenging terrain of Nigerian politics, and the dare-devilry of the practitioners in Oyo State at the time, would recognize the skills required not just to hold such a job for an apparent outsider but to come out of it unscathed.

He was very keen to see a vibrant psychiatric association emerge in Africa after the demise of the Association of Psychiatrists in Africa, a development that reflected the general political turmoil and instability on the continent in the

70's. So, when the opportunity arose to work with colleagues from across the continent to form another continental organization, he was at the forefront of the efforts. At the emergence of the African Association of Psychiatrist and Allied Professions during the World Congress of the World Psychiatric Association in Yokohama, Japan in 2002, he became the Association's Treasurer, a position he held until his death.

Olabisi never lost the ability to engage at the human level. He was always there to celebrate achievements with colleagues and be part of any social activity that could enliven any group to which he belonged. Many people, dumbfounded by the news of his sudden death, remember seeing him only a few days earlier actively participating in the ceremonies organized in memory of a colleague's father.

His death was unexpected and he would be so sorely

missed by all who had close associations with him, but more so in the academic and professional circles of psychiatry to which he had given so much and had not tired of giving. However, colleagues and family would take solace in the remarkable peace that characterized his passing and the fact that the enduring image of him will be that of a vibrant and engaging man of action. He is survived by his wife, Biola, also a professor in the same University, and four children all of whom have shown early signs of outstanding personal accomplishments in their own right.

Oye Gureje

Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry, University of Ibadan. President, Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria

Professor Olabisi Adebayo Odejide, simply called Bisi by his close associates, passed on unexpectedly but peacefully on 2nd January 2008. He was born on 13th August 1941.

At the time of his passing on, he had just retired as Professor of Psychiatry at the prestigious Ibadan University, Nigeria where he also studied medicine as an undergraduate, qualifying in 1968. Three years later he proceeded to Scotland, UK at the University of Edinburgh, and in a record time of three years obtained both his Diploma in Psychological Medicine and Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1974. He was elected Fellow of the College in 1986, by which time he had also become Fellow of the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria (1981) and Fellow of the West Africa College of Physicians 1980. In 1985 he was awarded Doctor of Medicine, a Doctorial academic qualification, by the University of Ibadan. The thesis was entitled "Psychosocial Features of Inpatients in long-stay Psychiatric Hospital: A Cross-Cultural Study". Immediately after completing his basic postgraduate training in Psychiatry in Edinburgh in 1974, he returned to Ibadan University, Department of Psychiatry and was appointed a lecturer in Psychiatry the same year. He rose through the ranks to the full chair of Psychiatry on 1st October 1981 until retirement.

He served with distinction on various assignments by WHO, UNESCO, WPA and UNODC and in various capacities in his own University, including being the Dean of the Faculty of Clinical Sciences and Dentistry and also Head of the Department of Psychiatry. He served his country in various capacities such as Director, Drug Remand Reduction Unit in the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency; Director, Institute for Advanced Medical Research and Training; Chairman, Osum State Health Management Board, amongst others. He was a Member or a Fellow of 9 Professional bodies both in Nigeria, Africa in general and International Global bodies. In particular he was a Founding and Board Member of the Association of African Psychiatrists and Allied Professionals of which he was the treasurer.

Professor Odejide was an academician and scholar par excellence with articles and papers in scholarly Journals, and

book chapters running into triple digits. He was an active member of the Faculty of the Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria (Psychiatry) where he lectured on Psychology, Clinical Psychiatry, Research Methodology, Psychopharmacology, Neurochemistry and Neurophysiology, besides teaching undergraduate Medical students, midwives and nurse students. His contribution in the work of Substance Use and Abuse both in Nigeria, Africa and the World will continue to impact policies and practice. He had just stated a multidisciplinary NGO on Alcohol and Drugs Information and Treatment centres. He was indeed an academician, scholarly researcher, teacher, mentor, a role model. His counsel was sought by many colleagues. His distinguished expertise will be missed by all who worked with him.

Professor Odejide had a very warm and accommodating personality and was remarkable for his deliberate attempt to avoid personal glamour and publicity, despite his achievements. He was very positive and encouraging to colleagues who experienced difficulty in any situation.

He did not miss an opportunity to talk affectionately about his family and his faith. No wonder that in his long and distinguished career he found time to serve as Chairman, Nigeria Baptist Medical board. He loved his country, and apart from his frequent travels and academic sojourns, he spent all his working life in Nigeria, and in particular Ibadan. He is survived by his wife Professor Biola Odejide and their 4 children. The youngest, a son, was about to graduate with a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Minnesota, (USA) at the time the Professor passed on. I cannot but quote the words of his wife "*We are sad, but not despondent because Bisi had an abiding faith in Gods' love and goodness and we are consoled by the fact he passed on the way he would have wished, peacefully and at rest with his maker*". All our thoughts go to his wife and children.

David M. Ndeti

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