

REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, PROF. YEMI OSINBAJO, SAN, GCON, VICE PRESIDENT, THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE PATIENT’S BILL OF RIGHTS AT THE BANQUET HALL, STATE HOUSE, ABUJA, ON TUESDAY, JULY 31, 2018.

PROTOCOLS

I am pleased to be part of this epochal event, the launching of Nigeria’s Patient Bill of Rights.

This Bill of rights is a significant contribution in establishing one of the most important rights of all humanity: the right to life in which inheres the right to adequate healthcare. Today, we are setting, and committing to, a new standard that both acknowledges, and commits to uphold some of the most fundamental principles of our common humanity.

Respect for human dignity is a universal principle. People never forget how they are treated, especially when they are at their most vulnerable – and there are not many scenarios of vulnerability that are as compelling as the ones that put a person in search of healing. It is, I think, fair to say that one can tell a great deal about how a country values its citizens from the attitudes prevalent in its healthcare systems and institutions.

While of course the ultimate goal is to ensure that the patient stays alive and in good health, it is just as important that the journey to that realization of the final goal is underpinned by the full preservation of human dignity. Indeed, the foundational ethos of the medical profession, embodied by the service charter that is the Hippocratic Oath, and its recent iteration of the Declaration of Geneva, fully recognizes the pre-eminence of the comfort and dignity of the patient.

I would go on to argue that this deference to the supremacy of human dignity is the responsibility not only of medical personnel, but everyone in the healthcare value chain: government, regulators, insurers, administrators, family and/or primary caregivers, and even the final consumer. Mutual respect helps ensure that interactions build confidence, enhance care and improve outcomes.

The Patient’s Bill of Rights is a remarkable effort at consensus and common purpose, in the face of the many challenges of our healthcare system in Nigeria. It cuts out the noise and distractions, and focuses on what is truly most important: putting people first. It serves as a code of accountability, constantly reminding us of the primary purpose of the healthcare system, and of the obligations of every player and stakeholder in that system. It helps clarify consumers’ expectations of providers and the providers’ responsibilities to consumers.

In terms of policy and funding, we, as a government, are acutely aware of the challenges of Nigeria’s health sector. And that is why we are single-mindedly pursuing the attainment of Universal Health Coverage for all Nigerians. For the first time ever, our 2018 budget

allocates 1% of the Consolidated Revenue Fund towards the funding of key health initiatives, in compliance with the National Health Act.

The Patient's Bill of Rights is a very timely complement to these policy and funding interventions. It will ensure that the increasing funding that is coming into healthcare in Nigeria translates into a direct improvement in the quality of the final output at what one might call the 'last mile' phase of healthcare delivery, the very personal arena of interaction between health personnel and the beneficiaries of the healthcare.

Indeed, health care is not merely about what we, as government put into it in terms of funding, equipment and so on; it is also about what the patient perceives that he or she is getting out of it. I would in fact argue that the latter may matter more than the former.

The champions of this ground-breaking initiative deserve our heartfelt commendations and I encourage all stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem to take advantage of the momentum and consensus that this effort creates, by focusing on the singular objective that is an improved level of patient care.

Our aim must be to develop a standard worthy of emulation, by ensuring strict compliance with and the enforcement of the Patient's Bill of Rights. We must hold ourselves - professionals and patients - accountable to the rights that this document enunciates, and when we see others who should, but do not, we must insist that they do.

For what this Bill embodies is potential. It is only by enforcing, and by ensuring sanctions in the face of failures of enforcement, that we can ensure that the potential is fully realized. Without realizing that potential, the Bill is reduced to a mere set of words worth no more than the paper on which it has been expressed. This is not the legacy that we seek.

I would like to specially commend the Consumer Protection Council chaired by the respected and very committed Barrister Emeka Nwakpa, for whom this whole consumer protection thing is a cause; and also led by its creative, dynamic and restless Director General, Mr. Babatunde Irukera, for initiating and leading the effort; and the Ministry of Health, led by the indefatigable Minister of Health, Prof Isaac Adewole, who has promoted so many health initiatives, and has troubled me very much. I was telling him a few minutes ago that I might come and take an office in the ministry of health. I am doing something for the ministry of health practically every day these days. And also the Honourable Minister of State for Health.

I commend also the several healthcare professionals, associations and institutions for cooperating and harmoniously working together in the interest of the nation and citizens. This is what genuine governance is all about: putting the welfare of citizens over and above everything else. And this effort exemplifies what is possible when multiple parties and stakeholders come together to focus on a common goal. It is my fervent hope that this synergy between policy, professionals, regulators and other vital components such as insurers, which has produced this Patients' Bill of Rights, will translate into new standards of quality, equity and dignity in the patient experience in Nigeria.

The pre-eminent human right is the right to life. But the right to life is a hollow platitude where life itself is without respect for the dignity of the individual. The Patients' Bill of Right is the bridge of dignity that links the right to life and minimum standards of healthcare that all of us deserve just by being human beings. In every step we take to improve the way our people are treated, we are individually and collectively ennobled. Respect for the dignity of one person, one patient dignifies us all.

I thank you very much for listening, and I hope that this is only the beginning of a very important journey of ensuring dignity in the service of all persons who come before our healthcare system

Released by:

Laolu Akande

Senior Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity

Office of the Vice President

31 July, 2018