

## **Saudi Arabia Sees Influx Of Nigerian Medical Professionals**

In a crowded hotel lobby in Abuja-Nigeria's capital city, hundreds of young and experienced Nigerian medical professionals patiently await the call of their names – they are hopefuls who have travelled from far and wide across the country, for a recruitment exercise being conducted by the Saudi Ministry of Health for several available positions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

As a periodic exercise, many of the hopefuls are no strangers to the process and keep fingers crossed for the best this time around.

A short drive away from the hotel is a busy general hospital where patients lace a long corridor-like waiting room, sickly and impatient for a physician's attention. A few attendant nurses pace out intermittently to advise on the physicians' availability. If many of the patients on the corridor are lucky, they will receive medical attention on the same day.

Both scenarios reflect an emerging reality – there is an influx of Nigerian medical professionals to other countries like Saudi Arabia owing to better working conditions, well-maintained equipment, and better remuneration, as countries like Saudi Arabia experience a shortage of medical professionals. Nigeria currently has a physician-patient ratio of 1-4,000, far higher than the World Health Organisation's recommendation of 1-600.

The Healthcare Federation of Nigeria reported an annual loss of \$1 billion last year to medical tourism as better-off Nigerians prefer to seek medical attention, especially under severe conditions, abroad.

Saudi Arabia has produced talented and dedicated doctors, scientists and engineers, many who studied at universities in Western countries thanks to a generous national scholarship programme. Many recipients and professionals, however, opt to work in the West.

"Almost 90% of Nigerian doctors here, not only received some degree of foreign training but also experience working in the western world, " says Dorcas Olufunke Ajayi, a Nigerian staff nurse at King Khalid University Hospital, who has spent 10 years working in Saudi Arabia. "However, the advantage that local Saudi doctors have is their accessibility to modern equipment, which is lacking in Nigeria. Both demonstrate a level of competence comparable to any medical specialist anywhere in the world. It would be worthwhile for Nigeria to invest more in state of the art medical infrastructure", she says.

Nigerian medical Professor, Kelechi C. Ogbuehi, resided and worked in Saudi Arabia for 17 years at King Saud University in Riyadh. He has never worked in Nigeria. "The trouble with Nigeria's medical sector is manifold and in many ways, the medical sector is a microcosm of Nigeria. Better systemic organization of the Nigerian medical sector and rules-based operation of the sector are the key changes to make", he says.

On the experience of assimilating into a new environment, he cited downsides that come from overt discrimination.

Dr. Sunday Ifeanyichukwu David, a Nigeria emergency physician at the Ministry of Health, Taif Directorate has resided and worked in Saudi Arabia for 3 years and prefers his professional experience there compared to his country, citing a conducive work environment and better remuneration. According to Dr. David, less complex protocols in Nigeria's health care delivery, especially in teaching hospitals as well as well funded and managed institutions, will ensure functional and readily available healthcare facilities.

A survey conducted by the Nigerian Polling Organisation, NOIPolls, in partnership with Nigeria Health Watch in August 2017, showed that about eight out of 10 medical doctors are currently seeking work opportunities abroad.

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