

EXCLUSIVE

NEWS ANALYSIS:

OKOTIE: A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH CARE

The presidential candidate of the FRESH Democratic Party, Rev. Chris Okotie, recently slammed the PDP led Federal Government over the poor state of health infrastructure in the country, which he said, compels many Nigerians to seek medical treatment abroad. In his view, apart from the colossal waste of foreign exchange involved, the country's image as a "corrupt and poorly governed nation" is further reinforced in the mind of the international community.

In a brief media interactive recently, Okotie expressed grave concern over the neglect of health sector by successive governments.

Okotie said, "it is unfortunate that 50 years after independence, Nigerians are still going abroad for routine check-up and minor health challenges." India a developing Country like Nigeria is now the favourite destination of our elite who need first class medical attention. His concern for total package, affordable health care for all Nigerians informs his party's emphasis on human capital development, a key component of the Millennium Development Goal of the United Nations.

"Rev. Okotie's main campaign plan this election year is to draw attention to Human Capital Development, the core of our Party's manifesto", according to Ladi Ayodeji, the FRESH Party spokesman.

The FRESH Presidential candidate lamented that popular fuji star, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister died in a foreign hospital, and scores of other lesser known Nigerian are in various hospital abroad because of our dilapidated health infrastructure. "We recall the sad case of the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who spent several months in a Saudi hospital before he was brought home, terminally ill, only for him to die a few weeks later. Okotie condemns such "criminal waste of human resources". He said it was ironic that our leaders who travel abroad for medical treatment are in a position to make things work at the health sector.

The Pastor – Politician said his party, FRESH, would invest heavily in health

infrastructure nationwide. “I’ve said that we’d emphasis human capital development, and that would start with giving every Nigerian total, affordable health. We’d look at health insurance, and community health care delivery at affordable cost”, Okotie explained.

The FRESH Presidential candidate posits that, dealing with health fundamentals meant reviewing the whole gamut of our health care delivery system from primary to tertiary health care. “Adequate funding and well articulated programmes would be put in place to combat HIV-AIDS, VVF, Malaria, River blindness, and the growing trend of malignant tumours and cancers ravaging the nation, not to talk of slow killers like diabetes and hypertension”, the Presidential candidate assured.

According to Rev. Okotie, a FRESH government would provide for every local government council at least five primary health care centres and one general hospital, and a tertiary health care facility serving five local councils. The intention is to bring health care to the people. He plans large scale recruitment and training of para-medical staff to run the expanded health facilities, and update the knowledge of our doctors and experts in the medical team. He believes that this would make up for the brain drain in the sector.

Okotie said his government would promote a policy of health-for-all, encourage local production of drugs, and engender harmonious relationship between alternative health practitioners. “Statistics show that 70 percent of our population live in the rural areas; we have not channeled enough funds to basic health care institutions like primary health care clinics, which service the rural communities”, he emphasized.

For the FRESH administration, Okotie explained that the focus would be on preventive rather than curative, health care. Therefore, we should expect more efforts in the direction of immunization, production and distribution of vaccines for the prevention of communicable diseases, while cholera, chicken pox, and tuberculosis, which still appear to be endemic in some parts of the country, would be vigorously combated.

Like Indian visionary, Pandit Nehru, Okotie believes that if you build the man, the man who build the nation. Therefore, he’d rather nurture a healthy child to grow into a thoroughbred, strong, well educated man, who’ll go ahead to develop his nation. To this end, Rev. Okotie said he’d commission a study of our dietary patterns to determine the nutritional content of our indigenous foods, and examine also, the foreign junk foods on our fast food menu, to ascertain the levels of

potential cancer agents in them. He wants to tackle the health problem from the root.

The briefing on his Health Care Programme is by no means, exhaustive, he said. He only tried to highlight a nagging problem that must be of concern to all Nigerians. “I regret to say that Nigerians only manage to exist; basic infrastructure and amenities like potable water, water, electricity, which are needed to guarantee decent living, are still lacking, after twelve years of democracy under the PDP. “That’s why we need some fresh initiatives which only the FRESH Party can offer”, the Pastor Politician told journalists recently. He maintained that health is a right of all Nigerians, just because they are Nigerians, they deserve to live healthy lives.

“In this New Year, I pray that God would grant us good health and peace, as we approach the elections. I hope Nigerians will use this golden opportunity to reflect on the poor state of the Nation, and vote to elect capable leaders like us, who can deliver the dividends of democracy” He pleaded.