

**LEAD DEBATE ON FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES,
OTUKPO, BENUE STATE (EST. ETC.) Bill, 2017 (SB. 504).**

Sen. David A.B. Mark (*Benue South*)

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, thank you for giving me the opportunity to lead the debate on this very important bill. I appreciate it and I am grateful.

Mr. President, my Distinguished colleagues, you will recall that the Federal Executive Council at its sitting of 20th May 2015 approved two universities and upgraded four of the colleges of education to universities of education.

The two universities were; The Federal University of Health Sciences Otukpo (FUHSO) Benue State and the Maritime University Okerenkoko, Delta state.

The four colleges of education upgraded to universities of education were; Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo State as Adeyemi University of Education, Ondo State, Federal College of Education, Zaria as Federal University of Education, Zaria, Federal College of Education, Kano as Federal University of Education, Kano, and Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Imo state as the Alvan Ikoku University of Education, Owerri, Imo State. The Federal Government appointed Vice Chancellors (VCs) and other principal officers and consequently constituted the Governing Councils.

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, FUHSO was in the process of admitting students for the 2015 academic session when the VC with the VCs of the other institutions mentioned earlier were issued with a letter that the approval given be put on hold. Before the approval was put on hold, the University had made appreciable progress including acquisition of 600 hectares of land with compensation fully paid, topographical and soil testing surveys, completion of the consultancy services as well as the structural and architectural design/drawings for the building of the University and its Teaching Hospital.

Prior to the approval of FUHSO, the Federal Government established the College of Health Sciences, Otukpo (CHSO) as a Campus of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi. Subsequently, Government appointed a Provost for the college and arrangement was in place to admit students in 2015 when it was upgraded to a Federal University.

Already, there is an existing infrastructure for the take-off of the University (FUHSO). A team of assessors, including the National universities Commission

(NUC), and Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) inspected the infrastructure and noted with a deep sense of satisfaction the adequacy of the facility for immediate take off of the University.

Mr. President and Distinguished colleagues, important as this background information is, it is however not the focal point of this debate. The kernel of the debate here is the fact that universities and higher institutions all over the world these days focus their attention on specialization. Research has shown that highly specialized institutions are more productive - make better diagnoses and fewer mistakes than general purpose institutions. The need for specialized institutions cannot therefore be over-emphasized. It is for this reason that you have Universities of Agriculture, Universities of Science and Technology, Universities of Education, Maritime Universities, Military Universities 'degree awarding institutions like the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA)', Air force College of Technology as well as the Police Academy among others. This informed the establishment of FUHSO to cater specifically for the vast area of the health sector.

The under-listed facts further underscore the benefits derivable from the establishment of the Federal University of Health Sciences, namely:

- *National Growth:* The economic development and progress of any nation depends to a large extent on the health care system. The health sector plays a major role in the economic development and progress of any nation. The health sector is one of the indices that is used to measure national growth or the level of development of any nation.
- *Manpower Development and Self Reliance in the Health Sector:* This University is expected to midwife high-level manpower development in the health sector and ensure self-reliance, which are germane to national growth and development. A healthy nation guarantees healthy workforce which increase productivity and in turn creates wealth.
- *Expansion of access to medical education:* The establishment of the University of Health Sciences is necessitated by the ever-increasing call and growing needs to revamp institutions of medical education in Nigeria.

It is a common knowledge that the health needs of the teeming Nigerian population puts enormous strain and stress on the national infrastructure and available health personnel. The existing medical schools, based on statistics

from Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), admit less than 20% of the candidates who desire and are qualified to study medicine.

A survey conducted by the Daily Trust newspaper of July 10, 2017 edition showed that only about 3,000 out of nearly 160,000 that applied can be admitted to study medicine in all the universities in Nigeria.

- *Adequate funding, effective monitoring and development:* At the moment, the discipline of Medicine and its allied sciences is 'swallowed' up in the general pool of the conventional universities with the result that it does not receive the needed attention, development and budgetary provisions.

Developing an international reputation for excellence in the field of medicine and related fields requires a University that is focused and committed to teaching and research in health sciences and health-related disciplines. The University, like its counterparts in other parts of the world, is envisioned as a multidisciplinary space for education, research, harnessing science and innovation to tackle health challenges bedeviling the nation.

- *Global trend in meeting the ever-expanding health needs of the countries:* The conventional university-based medical college system has not met the ever-expanding health needs of many countries, including Nigeria. This explains in part the current gradual paradigm shift in most parts of the world from the traditional university-based medical colleges towards the establishment of specialized Universities of Health Sciences.

For instance, India has 44 medical universities while Ukraine and Austria have 14 and 4, respectively. Other countries that have medical universities include but not limited to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Libya, South Africa, Ghana and Iran. (King's College London and John Hopkins (USA) are largely known for their prowess in medical and allied sciences). The University of Medicine established by Ondo State government in Nigeria is in its third year at the moment.

- *To meet the challenges of inadequate health professionals in the country:* Statistics show that the Doctor-patient ratio in Nigeria falls far short of the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.

The WHO standard stipulates the ratio of one Doctor to six hundred patients (1:600). This contrasts with the current one Doctor to about five thousand

patients (1:5,000) in Nigeria. At the moment, Nigeria has only about 35,000 practicing Medical Doctors serving a population of about 180 million people.

In other words, Nigeria needs no fewer than 300,000 Medical Doctors to meet the WHO requirement. Based on the existing system and statistics, it will take Nigeria about 100 years to have the number of Doctors she needs and that is if none of the Doctors and new graduates leaves the country and none of those practicing now dies.

Additionally, the quality of training, competence and skills needed in the medical profession remains problematic in Nigeria because the professionals are being trained in scarce, inadequate and quite often obsolete facilities. More often than not, the existing faculties of medicine are competing with other faculties for funding in the conventional universities.

- *To curb and reverse the menace of overseas medical tourism with attendant capital flight:* In the last few years, Nigerians have turned to India, South Africa, America, Israel, United Kingdom, Germany and other countries in Europe for medical tourism. A report published in Leadership newspaper of November 21, 2015 edition showed that Nigeria loses about Three Billion Naira to medical tourism annually.

Nigeria alone accounts for 42.4 percent of the medical tourism list of Africans going to India for medical attention. According to a report published in Punch newspaper (3/3/2012), India attracts more than 25, 000 Nigerian medical tourists every year. In monetary terms, Nigerians spend about \$260 million annually in search of medical attention in India alone. If our health sector facilities improve, we could become the Medical tourism destination for Africa.

- *Contribution to national economy:* The specialized University of Health Sciences commands potential economic benefits. With the current mantra to diversify the nation's economy from the hitherto oil-based economy, the health industry offers a great potential as a revenue earner.

For instance, a recent survey showed that the health care industry in India earns revenues accounting for about 5.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs as many as four million people. India's earnings from the health sector could reach \$73 billion by 2020. India's pharmaceutical exports to Africa increased from \$247.64 million in 2000, to \$3.5 billion in 2014.

There is therefore the need for the Nigerian government to invest heavily in the health-related educational sector, drawing from the experiences of other

countries like India in order to earn revenue, produce quality manpower in the health-sector and ultimately create employment to address the yawning gap of unemployment.

The anecdote of Specialized Universities of Health Sciences in other climes clearly demonstrates that there is high hope that the Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo, would revolutionize the health sector in Nigeria and bring to an end the endless search for medical attention (medical tourism) in other parts of the world, with its attendant capital flights from the nation's distressed treasury.

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, this hallowed chamber had supported and passed the Bills on the Universities approved earlier by the same Federal Executive Council, like the Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State and the Colleges of Education to Universities of Education.

May I humbly say that "what is good for the goose is also good for the gander".

In all modesty, may I submit that the establishment of FUHSO is therefore a giant step in the right direction. This Bill is a major milestone in the history of legislation in Nigeria.

It is in view of this and many more valid points that cannot be exhausted in this short debate that I urge you, Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, to please support this bill and recommend its accelerated passage.

Thank you all.