Celebrating the Life of Pa Joshua O. Obiri who Passed on to Eternity at 85!

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The Nigeria Physiotherapy Network joins the Nigeria Physiotherapy family at home and abroad to condole the family of Pa Joshua Omotshola Obiri who passed away yesterday in Nigeria at the age of 85.

Papa Obiri, a pioneer master clinician and neurologic physiotherapist immensely contributed to the foundational skills of many of our senior colleagues who passed through his tutelage and mentorship both at the UCH, and as Associate lecturer in the flagship physiotherapy program in Nigeria, at the University of Ibadan. He was one of the founding fathers of our profession in Nigeria, and a past president of the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy (1968-1969).

While Pa J.O. Obiri will surely be missed, we today celebrate his life and the great things done through him while he was here with us on this side of the universe.

In reaction to the passing of Papa Obiri, the follow elders and colleagues have this to say:

Professor Arinola Sanya:
I have just lost my professional father, mentor, role model, motivator, friend, confidant and the one who encouraged me to stay in the physiotherapy profession! I met Baba Obiri in 1974, I was a clinical student and he had just returned from an overseas training. He immediately spotted me and singled me out for special clinical training. He was not one of our lecturers, he was just led by God to focus on me. He called me "omo mi" (that was the genesis of my later use of the terms "omo mi" and "awon omo mi"), I called him "oga" and referred to him as "Baba Obiri". I was the first "omo Obiri" followed by another icon of physiotherapy in the person of Mr Tokunbo Odunowo! When I presented my Inaugural Lecture in March 2010, I acknowledged Baba Obiri as my "clinical mentor". To describe Baba Obiri as a clinical physiotherapy guru is a gross understatement! He was later recognized as a neuro physiotherapist par excellence but I acknowledge him as an all round giant physiotherapy practitioner! He set up the POP Unit and trained the initial set of Plaster Room Technicians in UCH. He was very good good in splinting for correction of deformities and he popularized wound dressing before he demystified neuro physiotherapy. He was an all rounder who never gave up on any clinical condition, he rather went back to the drawing board where he had anatomy, physiology and principles of physics well laid out! Baba Obiri taught me to strive for excellence and self actualization, to shun mediocrity and inferiority complex, to hold my head up, to be bold and confident, to work hard, to be meticulous, to press on, to push hard until I get results that will improve the outlook of whatever I lay my hands on to do. His life demonstrated that you cannot demand recognition but that you earn recognition by giving quality service to mankind. Oga could enter any office and be well attended to even by those who didn't know him. Many of the younger ones would not know that Baba Obiri was a bold and effective trade unionist! He was a dogged fighter for the well being of others. Baba Obiri was the most humane boss I ever had. He was very kind, generous, firm but fair and readily celebrated the success of his subordinates. Academically, administratively and clinically, he gave his all, he held nothing back for as many as were willing to work with the legendary Baba Obiri; A physiotherapist par excellence, a humane mentor, a worthy role model, an effective teacher of teachers. What a loss! Sweet is the remembrance of the righteous! I salute this great man who has positively influenced my career so strongly! Adieu Baba Obiri! You fought a good fight, now rest in the bossom of our Saviour till we meet to part no more! May the Lord comfort the Obiri and the Physiotherapy families at this time of exit of our dear Baba Obiri.

Professor Kolapo Hamzat:
It is often said that it is easier to have a child than have a good father. I thank God that he was a good father to me. While my teacher, mentor and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration) University of Ibadan-Professor Arinola O Sanya rightly claimed that she was the first 'omo baba', with all sense of humility I would consider myself about his closest non-biological grandchild. I first met him in 1992 whilst I was an undergraduate student in University of Ibadan. His clinical skills and dexterity in handling patients with neurological disorders is the most important reason why I fell in love (and still in love) with neurophysiotherapy! Many years after graduation in 1994, I would visit him to receive teachings in a highly informal setting on how to solve some neurological problems. He was always willing to educate me. He would also not hesitate to chastise me when necessary. For example, he looked at a splint I made one day and said "That's a good one but it is not of a quality that would show that I taught you how to make this detachable splints". He then went ahead to point out the

errors in my craft. In short I learnt at the feet of the master himself and I am the better for it. (1) Baba Obiri deserved honour and he was honoured in his life time by good people who appreciate what God did for them through this wonderful human being. Example is the lecture organized by staff and students of Department of Physiotherapy, College of medicine, University of Ibadan as part of his 80th birthday celebration about 5 years ago. It was a great surprise to him and mama (his wife) and he was genuinely grateful. In attendance were Mama Peju Nwuga, Professor Arinola Sanya, Prof MOB Olaogun, Prof Adesola Ogunniyi (Neurologist) who led others from his unit to the occasion, Dr Aderonke Akinpelu, Mr Alegbeleye among other eminent peoples. Of course the lecture was delivered by our erudite and eminent scholar cum clinician Mr. Olatokunbo Odunowo of Oluwaseun Physiotherapy Clinic Ibadan. One precious gift item the audience took home was more teachings on physiotherapy from the honouree. I am highly honoured to have been one of the people who celebrated his life when he could physically see it. (2) His place is heaven by God's grace. The light he shone on the lives of many of us directly and indirectly would ensure illumination of his path even as he is no more physically with us. He loved not just his biological family but also those of us whose paths crossed his. (3) He was a devour Methodist. I remember few years ago when he received the Archbishop and the church at home, he introduced me as one of his sons. I was actually asked to give a vote of thanks as a member of his family. Papa never saw religion (me being a Muslim for instance), tribe, colour or race. He served God directly and also indirectly by working for better humanity. (4) Recently I led a group of 3 University of Ibadan M.Sc Neurophysiotherapy students to his house on a social visit as they were desirous of meeting him. In spite of his frail health and sore throat he had that day, he spent nearly 60 minutes teaching us all. I had to stylishly stop the 'lecture' because I knew we were tiring him out but he wasn't going to stop. The 3 gentlemen were happy at the opportunity. A similar visit conceptualised with the current 4th year University of Ibadan Physiotherapy students was not to be. He left this world before we could make the trip. Unfortunately for me baba and I could not sit down and chat over my promotion to the rank of professor in neurophysiotherapy till his demise. I recall the eve of his departure was my last contact with him on his sick bed at the UCH. I will surely miss the man who blessed me in the most important ways-showing genuine love and teachings me physiotherapy and real life lessons. I would forever remember the rare privilege and honour he gave me by asking me to propose the toast at the party his family organized in his house for his 80th birthday. I was in my 30s then! I surely miss him profoundly already. May his gentle soul rest in perfect peace! Good night my Baba Obiri. May God uphold mama at this trying period. I pray God to give the entire family, biological and otherwise, the fortitude to bear the irreparable loss-Amen.

Seyi Abah, Ireland:

Paul Salufu:
We will miss him. One of the great pioneers of our noble profession. He was a professional father to some, professional grandfather to many, and professional great grand father to majority. At his old age, baba came to teach us PNF in school, what a strong passion he had for the profession. We thank God for the life he lived, and for the legacy he left with us, which will continue to be passed on from generation to generation. May the Lord give his family, and the NSP family the fortitude to bear the loss.

Kayode Oke:
The demise of Pa Joshua O. Obiri is a big loss to the physiotherapy family. Pa Obiri was a renowned neurophysiotherapy guru who history and posterity will always remember for good. His impact to the story of physiotherapy birth, development and maturation in Nigeria is worthy of note. May the gentle soul of Pa Obiri find a peaceful eternal resting place in the bosom of our Lord almighty

Funeral arrangements will be announced later by the family.

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