



Fidson Healthcare Plc

PRESS RELEASE

Fidson congratulates Health Minister, Calls for Improvement in Health Indices

Mr. Abiola Adebayo, Operations Director, Fidson Healthcare Plc has described as “inspiring and progressive,” the appointment of Professor Christian Onyebuchi Chukwu as the Minister for Health. While congratulating the newly sworn-in minister, Adebayo expressed hope that Professor Chukwu as a respected medical practitioner would bring his wealth of experience to bear on Nigeria’s health sector and lift it to enviable heights.

Adebayo, a pharmacist and executive director at Fidson Healthcare Plc, a leading healthcare company, called on the new Minister of health to initiate actions that will improve the health indices of the country which he says was at an abysmally low level. Referring to the United Nations Human Development Index, Adebayo decried a situation where Nigeria currently ranks among 12 countries in the world reporting the highest under-five mortality rate among children.

“Currently more than one million children under five years of age die annually in this country. Nearly one third of children under five are underweight; malaria still accounts for over 65 per cent of outpatient attendance in hospitals and 10 per cent death rate. With 59,000 annual maternal deaths, Nigeria ranks next to India with 117,000. “Primary Healthcare Centers spread across the country only cater for less than 20 per cent of their potential patients,” Adebayo noted.

The Fidson Operations Director is also particularly worried about the 4.5 per cent prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria which he said was “unacceptably high.” He therefore called on the health ministry to “collaborate sincerely with genuine indigenous or local manufacturers of Anti-retroviral drugs in Nigeria that have been certified and registered by the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control, NAFDAC.” Apart from assisting in the control and management of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, Adebayo said “such a move would also help generate more jobs for Nigerians and

stimulate economic growth like it happens in other countries such as India, Brazil, Tanzania and even our next door neighbor, Ghana.”

In addition to HIV/AIDS prevalence, Adebayo wants the new health minister to focus on the battle against tuberculosis which he described as a twin of HIV/AIDS that is also ravaging Nigerians. The Fidson Operations Director decried Nigeria's global rating as third after Rwanda and Malawi in Tuberculosis (TB) prevalence. He said a situation where Nigeria recorded over a million new cases of TB in 2009 alone was worrisome. While describing the disease as a major public health problem, Adebayo said “only an insignificant fraction of the sufferers come forward to receive treatment because of the social stigma that is associated with the disease. Many T.B patients often cough out blood and as a result feel self-conscious and people tend to stigmatise them.”

Adebayo also called on the new health minister to ensure that all the professional groups in the health sector work together as a team. “I am not happy with the contentions in the health sector,” Adebayo said while calling on the new minister to “bring the health sector family together because it is the team that will deliver results and not a singular professional group.”

While disagreeing with the widely held view in some quarters that only medical doctors can be Minister of health in Nigeria, Adebayo recalled that Professor Eytayo Lambo, a Minister of Health under the Olusegun Obasanjo administration is not a medical doctor. Lambo is a professor of health economics. “In the United States, the most recent secretaries for health (equivalent to Nigeria’s minister of health) Donna Shalala (under Bill Clinton), Tommy Thompson (under George W Bush) were neither medical doctors, nor even health practitioners. Yet no complaint was raised by the American Medical Association or the American public,” he said.

He added that “In fact, the present secretary of health appointed by President Barack Obama, Kathleen Sebelius, is a career and professional politician, she has a Bachelor of Arts in political science, a Masters of Public Administration and was governor of Kansas before her latest appointment. In the United Kingdom (U.K), the Department of Health is led by the Secretary of State, who is a cabinet minister. The present Secretary of State is Andy Burnham MP; he is the Minister of Health representing Leigh in Greater Manchester and he holds a Master of Arts (MA) in English Language and has been Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sports.”

In the final analysis, Adebayo said “what matters the most is the need to have a minister for health who is a good administrator who understands the issues and has the political will and strength of character to get the job done.” And in this respect, the Fidson Operations Director said he was confident that “Professor Chukwu will bring his wealth of experience as a highly referred medical practitioner to bear on the sector and ensure that Nigeria begins to enjoy good health indices very soon.”