

REPORT OF THE 7TH ANNUAL PROFESSOR JAMES OGOROR MEMORIAL LECTURE

The 7th Professor James Ogonor memorial lecture held on Monday January 25, 2010, at the multipurpose hall of the Women's Health and Action Research Center (WHARC). The lecture is organized annually in honour of the former Deputy Director of WHARC, the late Professor James Ogonor. In his life time, Professor Ogonor was a professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry at the University of Benin, and a great researcher with special interest in the use of traditional medicine for the management of various reproductive health problems. In view of this, WHARC devoted these lecture series to espousing the potential use and benefits of traditional medicines in the promotion of women's health in Nigeria.

Among the dignitaries present at the event were: Dr. (Mrs.) Ogonor, wife of Professor James Ogonor; Professor Augustine Okhamafe, Chairman of the event; Dr. Abel Guobadia, Board Chairman of WHARC; Professor O. G. Oshodin, Vice Chancellor, University of Benin; Professor P. Hugbo, Vice Chancellor, Western Delta University; Professor G. Omuta, Vice Chancellor, Benson Idahosa University; Professor A. G. Onokerhoraye, former Vice Chancellor, University of Benin; Dr. Moses Momoh, Edo State Commissioner for Health; Professor Cyril Usifoh, Dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Benin; Representatives of the Nigerian Medical Association; Associates of WHARC; distinguished Professors from the University of Benin; Representatives of various NGOs in Benin; students of the School of Nursing and Midwifery of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, and students of the University of Benin. A total of two hundred and sixteen (216) guests were present at the lecture.

In his opening remarks, the Executive Director of WHARC, Professor Friday Okonofua, welcomed everyone to the lecture. According to him, the memorial lecture was established in 2004 by WHARC to honor in perpetuity its late Deputy Director, Professor James Ogonor, who died on January 18, 2003. He thanked Professor MacDonald Idu for accepting the invitation to deliver the 7th memorial lecture despite his busy schedule.

Professor Okonofua stated that he was very delighted to have in attendance, the wife of Professor James Ogonor. According to him, 'Professor Ogonor's family members have made tremendous progress in their various spheres of life'. He prayed that his gentle soul may continue to rest in the bosom of the lord.

The Deputy Director of WHARC and member of the Ogonor memorial lecture committee, Professor Cyril Mokwenye, gave the citation of the Guest Lecturer. According to him, 'Professor MacDonald Idu obtained the Bachelor of Science degree in Botany in 1985 from the University of Benin; thereafter he obtained the Master of Science degree in Botany from the University of Lagos in 1989. In 1995, Professor Idu obtained the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Botany from the University of Benin, Benin City. He is currently a Professor of Phytomedicine at the University of Benin. Professor Idu has to his credit, one hundred and six (106) publications in both national and international journals, and has attended several conferences and workshops. He is a member of various learned societies in Nigeria and abroad'.

After the citation, Professor MacDonald Idu gave his lecture on the topic, '**Phytomedicine in Nigeria-Past, Present and Future**'. Speaking about Phytomedicine in the Past, Professor Idu stated that Phytomedicine have been linked to an ancient field termed ethno-botany as coined by John W. Hershberger in 1895 to mean the study of plants used by primitive and aboriginal people. But, according to Professor Idu, 'ethno-botany can be defined as the scientific study of plant flora and agricultural customs of a people. The use of plants as medicine was practiced by our ancestors, a process which must have started by trial and error. Also, the culture of plant use continues and it is estimated that about 80% of the people in the rural areas depended solely on herbal doctors for their health care needs'.

According to Professor Idu: 'In the present day, interest in medicinal plants as a re-emerging health aid has been fuelled by the rising costs of prescription drugs in the maintenance of personal health and well being. There is a trend of improvement in the development of phytomedicine in Nigeria. This is obvious following the establishment of

institutes and schools of learning in the areas of phytomedicine such as the National College of Natural Medicine in Lagos, the Village Chemist in Ile-Ife, and the Iris College of Natural Medicine.’ In line with his presentation, Professor Idu listed some Herbal clinics to include the following; Pax Herbal Clinic and Research Laboratories, Ewu, Edo state, and NARL Specialist Center for Research and Development of Phytomedicine in Ibadan. Speaking on the development in the field of phytomedicine, Professor Idu stated that the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is taking giant strides in promoting phytomedicine in Nigeria, by ensuring that herbal drugs are tested before they can be brought out for consumption.

Professor Idu stated that there is a possibility of incorporating traditional practices which include phytomedicine, into the health care system in Nigeria in the future. According to him, ‘for this to happen, these traditional practices would have been reformed into better health care practice with orthodox medicine’. Some of the examples of medicinal plants mentioned include; *Banana, Pineapple, Guava, Castor oil plant, bitter leaf, scent leaf, Hog plum, and Dry Zone Mahogany*. According to him, ‘herbal medicine is not entirely safe because of the active compounds which are very powerful and therefore dosage and administration can be a problem’. He therefore advised consumers that the medicines should be taken with care since they can interact with other drugs. He emphasized the benefits of Banana to include; cardiovascular protection, protection from ulcers, improving elimination, good eyesight, building strong and better bones, and promoting the health of the kidney.

In his conclusion, Professor Idu stated that the future of phytomedicine and traditional practices look bright and promising, and will make useful contribution to alleviating sickness and suffering in Nigeria. They should be taken care of to prevent extinction.

After the presentation, Dr. (Mrs.) Ogonor to give her remarks. She expressed her appreciation to God for the gift of life, and her gratitude to the Executive Director of WHARC for ensuring the continuity of the memorial lecture series. She also expressed her profound gratitude to the members of the organizing committee for their devotion and

hard work. The Chairman of the organizing committee, Professor Ogbonmwan, also expressed his appreciation to all the guests present, the Chairman and the Guest lecturer for honouring the invitation. He further invited everyone to the 8th Professor James Ogonor memorial lecture to be held in January 2011.

Closing remarks were given by the Chairman of the occasion, Professor Augustine Okhamafe. He congratulated WHARC for the effective time management and for organizing the lecture. He emphasized the benefits of phytomedicine and encouraged better use of plants.

The event ended successfully afterwards with a closing prayer.