

NUMBER OF MEDICAL TOURISTS FROM NIGERIA GROWING FAST



As far back as 2008, BBC reported that many of Nigeria's brightest scientists and innovators are being lured to the West with lucrative offers. More recently, in September 2013, allAfrica noted that Nigeria's brain drain exacerbated so much that the country lost 227 doctors in 2012, in addition to 637 who left the nation in 2010.

This persistent brain drain problem, coupled with the lack of competent doctors and updated medical facilities has sent desperate Nigerian patients seeking cures to greener pastures - more specifically, India, where medical tourism thrives.

Exodus to India

In 2011, abdominal pains affecting Usman, a father of seven in Nigeria were so bad that he boarded a plane to Delhi after the painkillers initially prescribed by his local doctor did nothing to alleviate his suffering. In India, doctors told him that he was in dire need of a liver transplant. **Usman is only one of over tens of thousands of so-called Nigerian medical tourists who make the frequent exodus to India.**

Usman believes the lack of competent medical professionals at hospitals and other medical facilities is due to lack of initiative on his government's part. Ministers mistakenly assume that these Nigerians are wealthy for seeking treatment outside of the country, but when the alternative is death, desperate times call for desperate measures.

Local Hospital Woes

Many medical facilities are seeing direct hits on their revenue and patient numbers as the medical tourism exodus - over 30,000 Nigerians have spent more than \$1 billion travelling mostly to India - continues to pick up steam. The government's solution is to launch a web-based directory listing the locations of the entire country's medical facilities to combat the issue of empty hospitals and reverse the outward flow of patients. Doctors, however, believe this move will be to no avail and instead recommend improved facilities to instill better patient trust, as current rudimentary technologies and equipment are incapable of diagnosing more serious ailments.

Call for Private Healthcare Providers

While this investment in better equipment can be a partial solution to the problem of lower patient traffic, healthcare experts are calling on private healthcare providers and hospitals to take up the mantle to spur state medical facilities to compete against each other and ultimately improve in both technologies and competencies. After all, if Nigerians can afford the exorbitant travel costs to seek healthcare services outside the country's borders, they can definitely afford the rates private healthcare professionals will charge.

Thus far, however, these recommendations have not been acted on and the exodus continues. **More and more Nigerians continue to leave the country when their local hospitals fail to accurately diagnose and treat their illnesses.**

This lack of state initiative to invest in the latest medical technologies and better patient care is sending worrying messages to the population. Healthcare costs have skyrocketed for Nigerians, as they immediately factor in flight and accommodation costs overseas. The local economy will also take a beating as more money leaves the country to fill India, and sometimes Dubai, Singapore and Malaysia's coffers.

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