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Diaspora professionals on home run

Written by MUDIAGA AFFE

For the over 10 medical practitioners that came from the United States to render free health services in Cross River State, no service was too great for their fatherland; while to the state government, it is a welcome development that would complement its health care delivery policy, writes MUDIAGA AFFE. Not less than 10 volunteer medical practitioners from the United States of America are currently rendering free medical services in Cross River State.

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The practitioners, who commenced a week-long free medical programme in Calabar on Monday, are Cross Riverians who have come from the U.S. under the umbrella of Effik National Association Incorporated. The programme is expected to be carried out in all the three senatorial districts.

Over 40 doctors of Nigerian descent from the U.S. were said to have initially expressed willingness to participate in the programme, but so far, only 12 have showed up for the free medical service that is costing the volunteers over \$600,000 (N9m) from their personal purses.

The team is conducting medical tests in areas such as eye care, blood pressure, sugar level, cancer and general medicine. They also dispense prescribed drugs to patients, while cases that require surgery are referred to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital under a special agreement.

According to the leader of the Diaspora medical mission, Dr. Felicia Bassey Akamune, who led others on courtesy visit to Governor Liyel Imoke in Calabar, the team is working with the state Ministry of Health to provide some free health services, especially in the rural areas. She added that the team was committed and excited to work with the state government.

At the Obong's palace, people started trooping out for the exercise as early as 7am, while more people turned out at the Idang Health Centre.

In receiving the team during the commencement of the programme in his palace, the Obong of Calabar, Ekpo Okon, expressed appreciation to the Effik National Association for organising the one-week free medical care for the people of Cross River.

He said that he was delighted that the programme had finally come into effect after several postponements, adding that it had given the poor people who could not afford medical bills the opportunity to see the doctors free.

"The programme has enabled the poor who could not afford to go to the hospital to see doctors for free medical examination and also obtain free drugs. I am also impressed that the people have reciprocated the gesture by turning out en masse," he said.

He said that other professionals in the Diaspora should emulate the Effik doctors by returning home to help in developing the state and Nigeria. The Obong said that the creation of office of the Special Adviser on Diaspora by the Cross River State Government was in the right direction.

"This will encourage those in the Diaspora to come back home and contribute to the development of the state," he said.

In his contribution, the programme coordinator, Dr. Awatt Awatt, said that the focus of the campaign tagged 'Health Empowerment,' was carefully chosen due to the prevailing poverty in the country.

"We also decided to do this now due to the prevailing health situation in Nigeria and the poverty level of the citizenry," he said. Awatt also said the programme would run for three years for it to effectively cover the three senatorial zones of the state.

"But we have to begin with Calabar (Southern Cross River), as the centre of the Effik Kingdom and also the capital of Cross River. Next year, we will move to the Central Senatorial zone and in 2013 to the

Northern zone,” he added.

However, while receiving the team in his office, Imoke said there was the need for Nigerians in the Diaspora to make available their acquired professional expertise and experience to the development of the country.

He challenged them to keep tab with the level of development in the state and also to look for opportunities where they could collaborate with government. While noting that their contributions would be greatly appreciated in rural areas, the governor lamented that most indigenous medical practitioners preferred working in urban areas.