

**NEUROREHABILITATION ACTIVITIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT, WORLD FEDERATION FOR
NEUROREHABILITATION**

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The Regional Vice-president of the World Federation for Neurorehabilitation, Professor Mayowa Owolabi has continued to promote the ideals of the WFNR in the sub-Saharan African region which he oversees. In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, Blossom Centre, a foremost institution across the sub-Saharan Africa continent, under the leadership of Prof Mayowa Owolabi, had over the years and currently, continues to pioneer excellent research, training, advocacy and efficient individualised services in neuro-rehabilitation. Guided by the mission for delivery of culturally-responsive and holistic therapy in response to neurorehabilitation gaps in neurological disease management, it continues to mitigate the consequences of/and improve quality of life of sufferers of neurological illnesses. The TREAT perspective below highlights some achievements and future events of the WFNR Blossom Centre:

T [Therapy]: Blossom centre had remained resolute in its vision of providing holistic and integrative rehabilitative healthcare services for all neurological cases referred from and across Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries. Though this vision suffered a temporary setback due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the centre has picked up in service delivery given the lifting of travel restrictions by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Till date, the excellent patient-centred services provided have translated to a better quality of life for approximately over 800 Patients.



R [Research]

Blossom Centre is home to stroke-related studies. The Systematic Investigation of Blacks with Stroke (SIBS Genomics) study is designed to discover, validate and functionally characterize novel genetic variants associated with ischemic stroke (IS) in people of African ancestry. Further building on the major findings of SIREN which reported the inverse relationship between green leafy vegetable consumption and incidence of stroke among Africans, Prof Owolabi and his research team is currently investigating the association between dietary factors including consumption of vegetables and cardiovascular diseases among Africans. Findings from this study will facilitate the development of preventive mechanism for stroke occurrence and curb the environmental indicators of stroke among Africans. He is also leading a study (African Rigorous Innovative Stroke Epidemiological Surveillance -ARISES) to determine the community burden of stroke. This will provide information to help plan rehabilitation services.

E – [Enlightenment]:

1. Activities of and findings from the collaborative research led by Prof. Mayowa Owolabi has been disseminated across platforms for continuous education within and outside the Nigerian environment. Within the academic sector, updates to his research is been published in the University of Ibadan Vice-Chancellors speech; Research Management Office etc. This was communicated in a latest bulletin of the University of Ibadan Research News courtesy of the Research Management Office
2. Further, to mark the 2020 World Stroke day, efforts are underway, courtesy of Prof Owolabi and his community engagement and involvement (CEI) research team, to develop and launch an indigenous, educative stroke app/cartoon which will be accessed by all age groups within and outside the shores of Nigeria. This educative tool will be made widely accessible to all

communities in Nigeria as a medium to sustain awareness, sensitization on the concept of stroke, risk factors, prevention and rehabilitation.

3. Implementation of stroke education using findings on dominant risk factors for stroke in Africa has, though steadily, commenced across few communities within the research network of Prof Mayowa Owolabi.

Advocacy:

1. The WHO/WSO Lancet Commission on Stroke in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) Initiative: This international initiative is a multidisciplinary, multidimensional initiative, which aims to improve stroke prevention, care and rehabilitation across the globe, with focus on LMICs policy reforms. This will lead the global fight against stroke via engagement with global relevant stakeholders [Ministries of Health of various countries, policy makers, health care providers, administrators and government] at all levels to mobilise the necessary resources for the pragmatic control, prevention and rehabilitation of stroke globally more especially in LMICs. Further, the Lancet Stroke Commission, led by Prof Owolabi has just concluded a survey from over 89 countries to assess the current status of stroke services along four pillars (surveillance, primary and secondary prevention, acute stroke diagnostic and care facilities, and post- stroke rehabilitation) with an economic analysis of the burden and intervention for stroke control and rehabilitation.



2. In addition to the birth of the Nigeria Federation of Neurorehabilitation [NFNR], Beninese Association for Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation (ABEKIR), Cameroon Association of Neurorehabilitation (NEREMODIS), Prof Owolabi has expanded his vision to reduce the burden of stroke in the African continent via the recently established African Stroke Organization (ASO). Prof Mayowa Owolabi is the co-founder and pioneer co-chair of the African Stroke Organization (ASO). The African Stroke Organization (ASO) is a new pan-African coalition that brings together stroke researchers, clinicians, and other health-care professionals with participation of national and regional stroke societies and stroke support organizations. With a vision to reduce the rapidly increasing burden of stroke in Africa, the ASO has a four-pronged focus on
 - a. Research
 - b. Capacity building
 - c. Development of stroke services, and
 - d. Collaboration with all stakeholders.

Training:

3. The Nigerian chapter of the WFNR – Nigeria Federation for Neurorehabilitation had plans under way to host the third in series of its annual conference and capacity building session in the later part of 2020. This was stalled as a result of the pandemic. Plans are underway to set-up scientific webinars with select members of the WFNR flying faculty serving as facilitators.

4. Additionally, Prof Mayowa Owolabi is the Director of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) University of Ibadan Centre of Excellence for Non-Communicable Diseases (ACE-NCD). As a network whose aim is to support and strength research capacity, strategic plans are underway to launch regional training opportunities within the West Africa region to build capacity of early and middle career researchers under the thematic areas of the ARUA network.