



CASE STUDY

Doctors Volunteer to Work in Rural Health Facilities in Enugu State

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A volunteer doctor, Dr. Agunwa Chuka, attends to a pregnant woman at Nara health centre

The expression “brain drain” became popular in Nigeria a few years ago, referring to the flight of graduates abroad to work, especially medical doctors and nurses. Some of those who could not secure a visa or a job overseas remained in urban areas, refusing to work in rural communities even when employed by the government for that express purpose. A number of reasons have been given—social amenities and infrastructure are almost zero. Bad roads, poor electricity supply if there is any at all, no good accommodation—living in rural areas is like sleeping, or wasting away. No “action”!

Feedback during PATHS2-supported facility community outreaches showed that most community members wanted doctors in the health centres.

This demand was confirmed by the large number of patients that turned out to be seen by the doctors who had accompanied the PATHS2 team to the outreaches, where the doctors provided free consultation and drugs. One of the strategies that PATHS2 used to tackle this situation was to conduct advocacy visits to the Local Government Areas (LGAs), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and state government about the need to provide opportunities to patients in rural communities to be attended to by doctors. Eight of the doctors deployed to the LGA secretariats in Udi, Ezeagu and Nkanu West and East LGAs bought into the idea and volunteered to serve in 10 rural health centres in the LGAs. They began serving there in the last week of May 2012.

Dr. Agunwa Chuka, a resident doctor in Community Medicine, heard about the doctors volunteering in the health centres and got involved. He contacted the State Ministry of Health (SMoH) and PATHS2 about his desire to volunteer. Having graduated from the University of Nsukka eight years ago, he had always wanted to give back to the community, but hadn't known how to do that until he heard about the PATHS2 initiative. Now, he and the other volunteer doctors visit the 10 health centres once every week, and give priority to pregnant women and

children under five. Dr. Chuka provides these services at the Nara Primary Health Centre.

The doctors work from 9a.m. to 4p.m., except when there are still patients to be seen after 4 p.m. or when there is an emergency, in which case they stay at the health centre till 6 p.m. They then return to the LGA secretariat, and from there they go back to Enugu city, where they live. To encourage doctors to participate, PATHS2 provides opportunities to build their skills in any PATHS2 intervention area they are interested in, like behaviour change communication, monitoring and evaluation, or project management. PATHS2 involves them in structured activities in these areas when they are free to participate.

“The work can be tedious, but it’s rewarding,” the doctor says. “The energy of the staff is high. We relate quite well with them, not as the boss, but to lend a hand. More doctors are getting interested. A new doctor joined us today.”

The patients waiting at the health centre that day could not hide their excitement as Dr. Chuka arrived. They laughed cheerfully as they told of their relief at having a doctor visit the health centre, even for one day in a week. Thirty-two year old Mrs. Veronica Animba now attends the health centre for antenatal care. She was six months pregnant when, she said, “It was announced in church that doctors would be coming every Monday to the Nara health centre. This is my third visit since I



Mrs Veronica Animba arriving Nara Health Centre with her husband

registered, and I have seen the doctor every time. I used to go to the chemist, but now I come here from Agbariji (about five miles away). My husband brings me on his bicycle.”

Mrs. Nkiruka Chiwetalu, the Nara Health Centre Officer-in-Charge, tells of the relief the presence of a doctor has brought the community. “They are happy. It has just shown the community that this place is recognised. They go on to say that our centre is now in the class of the health facilities found in Enugu [City] and Agbani. The doctor is a very hardworking young man.”

The table below shows how attendance at the facility has increased since the doctor began coming to Nara Health Facility:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Total outpatient visits	198	205	235		228	334	349
Total ANC attendance	58	57	78	53	67	66	83

For more information, please contact: Chigbo Chikwendu (c.chikwendu@paths2.org)

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The Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase Two (PATHS2) is a six-year development initiative that aims to ensure Nigeria achieves important health-related Millennium Development Goals.

Funded by UKAID from the Department for International Development, PATHS2 is working in partnership with the Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders to improve the planning, financing, and delivery of sustainable health services for those most in need. In addition to its work at the Federal level, the PATHS2 programme is implemented in the five states of Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos. PATHS2 follows the successful PATHS programme, which was implemented from 2002 to 2008.

PATHS2 is managed by Abt Associates, in association with Options, Mannion Daniels, and the Axios Foundation.

