

**Benjamin Oluwakayode Osuntokun:**  
**A Beacon in Education and**  
**Healthcare Research**

**Tolu Odugbemi**

OON, NNOM, FAS, PNMC

*Professor of Medical Microbiology & Parasitology*  
*Vice-chancellor, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria*  
*former president, National Postgraduate*  
*Medical College of Nigeria*

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The Benjamin Oluwakayode Osuntokun Trust  
c/o Professor O. Osuntokun  
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## INTRODUCTION

I am very happy to stand before you all, a distinguished group of Nigerians and future Nigerian leaders, as your guest speaker. I appreciate this honour and am short of words at this historic memorial lecture held in honour of a foremost old boy of Christ's School, Ado-Ekiti. Christ's School was built on a strong faith and belief in God and still stands erect in excellence, probity and service to the nation. The school prayer means a lot and possibly influenced for good all those alumni and alumnae:

*Grant, O LORD  
That this school may be a Christian school  
Not in name only  
But in deed and in truth  
For the sake of Christ  
Whose name we bear, Amen.*

This is a great day to remember our famous school on Agidimo Hills, of which Kayode Osuntokun was a product. May God continue to strengthen the staff and students of Christ's School, Ado-Ekiti, and other institutions that share a similar vision and mission.

As school boys at Christ's School, Ado-Ekiti, in the 50s, there were stories and myths of great and outstanding old students who were our heroes; Kayode Osuntokun was one of them. Indeed, I was privileged to be in Block 3, Dallimore

House, where I recall once peeping through the window to admire a beautiful sports car parked in the school lot. It belonged to our local hero, 'Oga Kayode Osuntokun', who had come to visit our hall master, the late Mr. R.A. Ogunlade, whom we all called 'Otura'. He later became the Venerable Ogunlade and one of the greatest teachers and principals of our school.

\* \* \*

The topic of this lecture is *Benjamin Oluwakayode Osuntokun: A Beacon in Education and Health-Care Research*. I would like to quote excerpts from an obituary by Professor Adelola Adeloye, a classmate of Professor Osuntokun at Christ's, Ado-Ekiti, from 1946 to 1951. The obituary, titled 'Professor B. Oluwakayode Osuntokun and his Nunc dimittis', was published in the *African Journal of Neurological Sciences*. I quote,

In his postgraduate and more mature career, Osuntokun gained a string of postgraduate degrees and professional qualifications: PhD (Ibadan) 1969; MD (London) 1971; FRCP(London) 1974; FMCP (Nigeria) and FWACP,1976 and D.Sc.(London) 1977. He was made an Officer of the Federal Republic(OFR) of Nigeria in 1978, and in 1984 he received the highest award of his country, the Nigerian National Merit Award (NNMA) for distinguished contribution at national and international level in Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Arts and Culture. In addition, in the

same year, the University of Maiduguri awarded him DSc(honoris causa) and in 1985, shortly after his 50th birthday, two chieftaincy titles were conferred on him in Ekiti, the district of his origin.

Professor Osuntokun was rightly described as a leading neurologist and one of the icons of modern medicine. In an 'In Memoriam' by Adesola Ogunniyi in the journal *Neuroepidemiology* and titled, 'Benjamin O. Osuntokun (1935-1995): The Pioneer of Neuroepidemiology in Africa', the obituary provides more insight into this enigmatic medical practitioner. I quote again:

The late Prof. Osuntokun was a prolific writer, a mentor, an erudite scholar, a great teacher-researcher and scientist. He authored/ co-authored over 300 publications. A well-read and widely-travelled man, he was a shining example to his juniors and peers. He gave his best at all times and no problem was insurmountable. He carried out his research programme with much zest and enthusiasm, and was always a source of inspiration to many of us who worked with him. He contributed immensely to the training of many young neurologists.

The impression by Adesola Ogunniyi, a former student and colleague of Professor Osuntokun, that ‘Oga was a super trainer of trainers’ made me add a sub-theme to my lecture, which is: “*Education as a tool for nation-building.*”

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Nigeria’s educational system is currently in disarray, along with other aspects of society that are fast breaking down. As efforts are being made on the national scene to try one form of constitution or the other, we have also tried to identify which educational system would be most suitable for Nigeria. First, we had a 6-3-3-4 educational system; at another period, a 9-3-4. Even holiday periods for our students change at will. We have to look back over the past year or academic session—how many days were spent by primary, secondary or tertiary students at school or university? The tertiary university system in Nigeria has just come back to life after a three-month strike. We thank God for the successful conclusion of the FGN-university staff unions re-negotiation led by Deacon Gamaliel O. Onosode, OFR, a man that God destined to be used for the signing of the agreement. We must appreciate all stakeholders in education for bringing the crisis to an amicable end.

Is it not time for us to start checking ourselves or our society, instead of blaming the system in Nigeria for the failure of our various programmes?

Education is meant to improve our town, local government area, state, our country Nigeria, and even our continent Africa. Honestly, we have hardly moved forward.

In fact, the wholesale importation of American and European cultural norms has degraded our traditional African values of respect, integrity, honesty, fair play and justice. Foul, unacceptable and rejected behaviours elsewhere in the world are increasingly being imported to ruin our schools, colleges and universities.

Education should start on the home front. I remember around 1969/70, an American friend of mine invited me to a church conference in Philadelphia. It was a full house, with many religious people discussing the declining societal values in the United States of America. It was a protracted discussion with many points being suggested on how to restore the good old values. As a young visiting African, I watched the heated debate at the meeting. My friend, Mr. Henderson, looked at me and inquired: "Won't you make a contribution to this long debate, Tolu?" I replied yes, thanking the chairman for inviting my comments. My comments, in summary, were along this line:

It is most pleasing for me to see active religious people assemble in the church heartily debating how things should improve in our society. The societal problems we are discussing, do they not arise from human beings starting, most often from their childhood? Will children not become adults? If problems arise from human beings and these human beings start out first as children and then adults in our community, how many, out of all the adults present at this meeting, can confidently state where his or her

child is at this time? And what type of behaviour or manner is being exhibited by that child, whether smoking, drinking, drug peddling, or keeping bad company?

I noticed people at that meeting looking at each other. The chairman took a deep breath and stated that all that needed to be discussed had been summarized by their African friend. All should go back home and be more involved in the training of their children, so that they could be educated and useful in the development of their various communities.

### **Discipline in schools**

Many Nigerian educational institutions are now prostrate or in total decay, but Christ's School excels because of discipline and has produced the genius whose memory we now honour today. Discipline is very important in attaining any significant achievement in human endeavours. Character-building must accompany any form of learning for the products of such institutions to be relevant to societal development. There are various aspects of nation building that span teaching, engineering, carpentry, medicine, law, religion, philosophy, the arts, technology, management, among the many professions.

Christ's School, which produced the likes of Osuntokun, was founded on proper education. Our founding fathers prepared us for nation-building, by including various types of vocational training into our curricula from its inception. No wonder the man we honour today contributed



so much to knowledge!

### **The Dignity of Labour**

Dignity of labour is vital! No profession in the true sense can be pushed out of relevance; otherwise, the nation will suffer. Over the years, our schools were allowed to crumble; teachers' pay was not enough to meet survival levels in Nigeria. Teachers had to turn to other trades like selling 'pure water' and question papers to survive. Some invigilators in *special centres* often allowed impersonators to come to such centres to take examinations for unprepared candidates after paying fees to such invigilators. This lack of commitment and dedication on the part of the moulders of society is not entirely their fault. Urgent attention is needed to restore honour and dignity to the teaching profession, so that the best can be attracted to the profession, as in the past.

### **A Reminiscence of Secondary School Days**

There are parents and elders present here today who attended great institutions, in particular Christ's School, where character building was vital and crucial in the proper education of children.

In the days of Osuntokun, in the late 40s, and up to about 40 years ago when I was at Christ's School, our programmes included carpentry, masonry and farming-vocations, apart from the major academic activities. There were various student societies, like the Science Society, the Historical Society, the Young Farmers Club, etc. Membership and officers who ran the societies were democratically elected

from and by the student members. Leadership qualities were imbibed by such practices early in life. There was no need or time for cultism and other anti-social activities. Any person who was at least one year ahead of you at school had a special title like *Oga* or *Senior*." Students with bizarre manners were counselled; offending students had various disciplinary measures meted out to them, depending on the level or degree of their offence. Disciplinary measures included 'imposition', where students had to cut grass for 30 minutes to one hour on weekends.

'Detention' was a more serious punishment. The names of students in detention were read out at Friday assembly by the school principal. The dishonour of having your name read out was enough punishment back then when society savoured good values. Detention also carried the added sanction of students not being allowed to go out during 'open days'. Other disciplinary measures ranged from suspension to expulsion. The regulations of the school were for all, and punishments meted out to offending students were no respecters of the social standing of their parents. We were equal before the rules and regulations of the school. No ethnic or religious differences were discernible. We were a happy bunch of fellow students looking to the future with bright hopes and dreams.

### **Co-operation and Good Relationship**

Before I left Christ's School, I had the privilege of meeting students from other schools beyond our geographic zone. We enjoyed the hospitality of Hopewell Institute, Calabar; Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha; St. Patrick's College,

Asaba; St Paul's School, Zaria, to mention a few. We went on excursions to these schools under the auspices of our student societies. This was apart from the sporting activities that brought schools together too in those days.

### **Role Models**

Our teachers, to mention a few names like the Revd. Canon L.D. Mason, R.A. Ogunlade, J.O. Aina, S.A. Akeju, A.J. Forster, Hathaway, A.C. Reed, Lewis, Okunrotifa, Ajisafe, and outstanding old students like Benjamin Olukayode Osuntokun, Ojo Igbole, Olubumo, Fola Alade; Taylor, Esan, and Adelola Adeloye were among our role models.

Most African parents aspire for their children to excel. A school teacher, a priest, or a farmer would like his offspring to be great and accomplished in life. This attitude of catching them young has produced eminent people of integrity in our society. A typical example is the late Kayode Osuntokun, whom we honour today. The phrase, *Catch them young*, is now a popular one. The Yoruba people have a saying: '*To omo re yio si fun simi.*'<sup>1</sup>

### **Team Spirit in Nation Building**

We parents want peace, but we need to sow the seeds of peace by bringing up our children in godly ways, showing respect for elders and constituted authority. Professor Oluwakayode Osuntokun paid a lot of attention to the upbringing of his own children, who are today eminent citizens of Nigeria. I recall

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<sup>1</sup>'Train your child well and he will bring you peace.'

one of my encounters with Uncle Kayode, and I share his view that no matter what we have achieved in life, we are nothing if we have not trained our children properly. Honesty, hard work and expression of all good values that we used to honour in the old days and were even taught in civics classes should be resuscitated and be taught as attributes of good citizenship in our schools. The acquisition of wealth by means which are not decent and honourable should be condemned. There is an unbridled and reckless display of wealth, which should have been directed to productive ventures in health, education and agriculture. The various codes of conduct among various professional groups—judges, doctors, civil servants—need to be branded into their collective consciences. May God support, guide and guard us in building a better society.

### **Training of Children in Nation Building**

We need teamwork to achieve any success in society building. Chief Daniel O. Fagunwa, a renowned author, teacher and philosopher, in his book, *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*, a novel written more than seventy years ago, describes in detail what should be expected of children and their parents. Professor Wole Soyinka, an eminent writer and Nobel Laureate, did the English translation of the Late Pa Fagunwa's masterpiece. The relevant portion of the work will now be read

to you, distinguished audience.<sup>2</sup>

My dear fellow humans, you who bring forth children, Train your child when he is still a child; remember that he is a gift to you and do not let your child be lacking in home training, lest you regret it after tomorrow. . .

. . . Remember that the world is inconstant and that you may become a poor man tomorrow, when a halfpenny will prove an 'elder' to you. If you are poor, cut your coat according to your size; do not envy the children of wealth lest you enter into eternal debt. A man lives according to his means. And, whether you are rich or poor, be sure that you control your wife; see that she does not spoil your children. Some wives improve the behaviour of children but others ruin them, for there is far too much human kindness in the sockets of a woman's eyes. Do not permit your child to keep bad company that he starts from youth to pub-crawl, insulting women all over town, dancing unclean dances in public places and boasting, "We are the ones who count, we are the elite

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<sup>2</sup> Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka (1982) from *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*.

over others.” Then would calumny stick onto your child and people would sing, “He drank banana wine and was solidly drunk; he drank the wine, the wine of debtors and was solidly drunk, solidly drunk, he was solidly, solidly, solidly drunk.”

If you hand your child to another to bring up, examine carefully what kind of person he is. Many guardians do not appreciate the value of a child; do not give your child to a man who is hard as stone, one who will inflict suffering on your child, nor should you hand your child over to the excessively soft-hearted who will merely spoil him. The grandfather and the grandmother are risky guardians so beware of them. If you find that you cannot avoid leaving your child with them because he will be of great help to them, well it is not too bad, do so, but be not too far from the child, watch after your treasure lest it become ruined.

Watch how your child speaks, rid him of lies, let not unseemly language pass his lips, don't let him utter things which do not go with the stomach, filthy discourse, disgusting words, boastful words and words which far exceed the language of children. See that he does not become a hardened thief in your hands and in

an inmate of prisons after tomorrow. If you have money, educate your children, and even if you do not possess much, as long as you do not enter into debt and daily food is not too great a problem, try hard to educate him. If you have to cut wood from the bush and sell it, endeavour to bring the matter to a successful end, bearing in mind that one brilliant child is not to be equated with a thousand children who have no training whatsoever; he is superior to them.

Nevertheless before you embark on this endeavour, see to it before you begin that you do not stop halfway lest people ridicule you in, the words of the song, "Shame on you, shame on you, you made the promise but you cannot fulfill it, shame on you." The ridicule itself is however the smallest part of it, what follows a hundred and twenty far exceeds a hundred and forty; the name, which your child now bears, is worse than it was as the beginning, he is now a half-educated person. The half-educated feels ashamed to take up his cutlass, yet the amount of book-learning in his head is not enough to earn him a living. The half-educated wants to wear shoes, yet his salary can hardly buy him a buba. Therefore, understand that if you cannot take it through to the end it is no

compulsory matter: teach your child some useful trade. If it is farming, let him learn it well; see for yourself how the black nations are rich in land, it is a gift from their Creator to their great ancestors; if it is trading, teach him soundly, and if it is road-building, let him understand it thoroughly. Let him not learn a little of this and a little of that, jumping from one thing to the other, as a man who chases two mice at once surely catches nothing. This is your time, prepare this for him; do not take out your resentments on him saying, "I will do nothing to help you for your mother is ill-behaved and is herself useless as a person." I want you to know that even if a child is as tall as an elephant and his girth like a buffalo's, a father is still a father. A child has but little sense, it does not exceed this much. The knack for learning is one thing, the knack for strutting another; if the moon appears by day and the sun by night, the wisdom of the old cannot desert the aged forever. Therefore do not drag your interests in the mud; train your child now, that he does not become a worthless person in the world, so that he does not curse you after tomorrow and you go to meet Death with a broken heart.



### **Young Nigerians: Commitment, Honesty and Hardwork**

The above quotation from my uncle, Papa Fagunwa, a renowned, teacher, writer and philosopher, highlighted the importance of honest living in order for the African society to excel. Deceit, idleness, greed, extravagant living and ignorance are prevalent in our communities.

Our dear students and parents, remember the old adage: 'Honesty is the best policy'. Please work hard not to search for 'odu' or 'egunje', 'expo' and making use of microchips, but to search for true knowledge.

Colin Powell (1996), in his book, *My American Journey*, published by Ballantine Books, New York, noted, and I quote,

. . . you can be anything you want to be. But wanting to be is not enough. You have got to study for it, work for it, fight for it with all your heart and soul. . . . Reject the easy path of cheating, dare to take the harder path of work and commitment, the path that leads somewhere. I want black youngsters to learn about black writers, poets, musicians, scientists and artists and about culture and history of Africa. My message to young African-Americans is to learn to live where you are and not where you might have been born three centuries ago. Others may use my race against me but I will never use it against myself. My blackness has been a source of pride, strength and inspiration.

What a message from a sound mind! As far as I am concerned, I love my country, I love my blackness, and I love my cultural

heritage.

Nigeria is retrogressing, in that instead of our present educational system helping to propel us forward in development, we face a gloomy picture of decay because of the wrong ideas and teachings that make 'self' instead of the 'society' as a centre of development. The over-development of 'self' in positive ways would not have harmed the nation, but the selfishness and greed attached to 'self-development' has.

The primary, secondary and tertiary levels can be used as tools for development if properly handled from childhood to adulthood through various systems of education.

Our youths should work hard in a disciplined fashion at whatever training or educational system they find themselves engaged in. The goals of their education should be towards the development of *self* and *society*; therefore, one should aim to excel in good things for the betterment of one's community. Education should teach tolerance of other views—political, religious, and social. The country has been struggling to have a democratic system—only peace, orderliness and tolerance of other views can lead to democracy in any society. The fault so far is not in the system but in the operators of the system, and whatever system we have, even if it is brought from heaven, would certainly fail in the hands of the wrong operators. The better educated the people of a country are, the higher the calibre of their representatives and the better the system works. A higher level of education means that people will more readily vote on issues rather than personalities or ethnicity, and the more accountable their leaders have to be.

Proper education would recognize and give ample room for various workers. A tree does not make a forest: teachers, farmers, doctors, religious leaders, engineers, technicians, lawyers, accountants, barbers, drivers, economists, food sellers, petty traders, road-workers, builders, politicians, health workers, post-officer workers, policemen, soldiers, customs officers, tailors, and so on are makers of a good society. Just as termites are properly organized in their society, so also human beings should learn to work together for the upliftment of their society.

### **Health Care Delivery and Research**

It is incredible that Professor Oluwakayode Osuntokun has to his credit over 300 researched publications in leading and peer-reviewed international journals. He is rightly described as the father of neuroepidemiology in Africa. His research efforts covered all aspects of the neurosciences and neurology. Some of his research areas included:

- cassava diet, chronic cyanide intoxication of dietary origin, and neuropathy in Nigerians;
- a cross-cultural community-based study of dementias: methods and performance of the survey;
- complicated migraines and haemoglobin AS<sup>3</sup> in Nigerians;

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<sup>3</sup>Sickle cell trait

- neuropsychiatric manifestations of typhoid fever in 959 patients;
- epilepsy in Nigerians;
- headache as a presenting symptom in Nigerians;
- capacity building for ethical consideration of epidemiological studies
- perspective of developing Alzheimer's disease is rare in Cree;
- prognosis of Guillain-Barre syndrome in the African: the Nigerian experience

This is a remarkable research agenda, but what is also remarkable is the fact that the research activities of our dear teacher and friend covered various segments of Nigerian communities, and also had a broad spectrum of clinical areas. The vital role of research, either basic or applied, in human development was evident in all the efforts of Professor Osuntokun.

### **PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING: An Experience**

Prostate cancer is a common cause of death among males (fig. 1) . The tumour occurs in the prostate gland, which is situated at the base of the bladder in the male reproductive system. The cause is largely unknown.

A World Health Organization report stated that in 2005 prostate cancer was the most common cancer found in men in

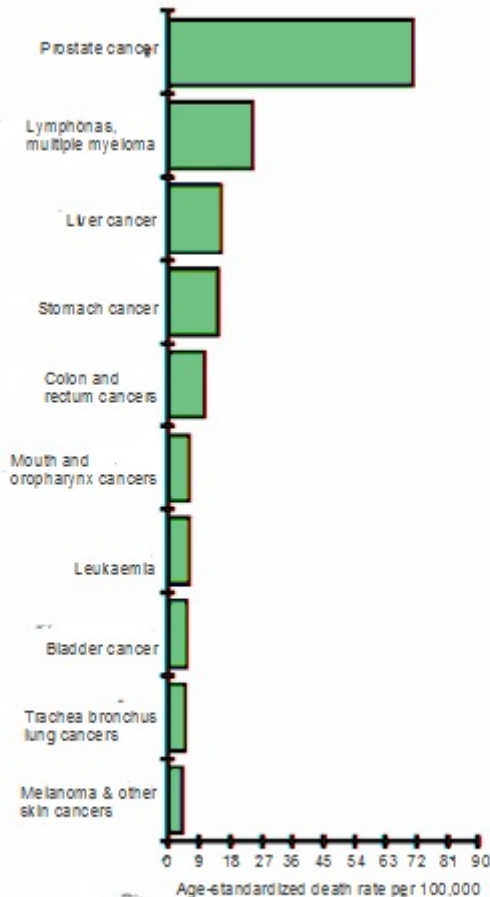
Nigeria. It may present with symptoms such as urinary bladder obstruction (which is also a feature of prostatic enlargement) or without symptoms, as in most cases and with a high index of suspicion detected during routine screening by digital rectal examination (DRE) and prostatic specific antigen (PSA) test. My apologies—to the surgeons, in particular, urologists—present here today who will be wondering what a medical microbiologist has got to do with this subject.

Certainly, experience is the best teacher. Human beings are unique, and possessing with varying degrees of faith or the lack of it, in the omnipotent God. Faith in God must also be accompanied with realities of what modern science and technology can provide. We all sing and say, 'Prevention is better than cure'. To what extent do we put this into practice in our day-to-day life? Therefore, I am including in this presentation two figures which project the percentage of various types of cancer among women and men in Nigeria as preventive measure.

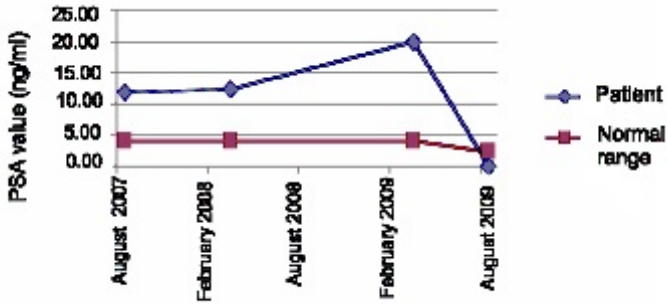
### **A CASE REPORT**

In 2007, a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test was ordered by a medical consultant while carrying out a routine medical examination on a 62-year-old actively and upwardly mobile man. The laboratory result came with a value of 11.9 ng/ml. The normal range is between 0-4 ng/ml. This is certainly on the high side, but repeated clinical examinations with digital rectal examination (DRE) proved consistently normal and the prostate was not palpably enlarged. A repeat PSA test, in March, 2008 showed a new value of 12.27 ng/ml, and by

March, 2009, the value had risen to 19.94 ng/ml! The anxiety could be seen on the faces of colleagues and friends, but for the man it was just a value—one of those things, and work must go on. Note that the patient was long overdue for a holiday.



**Figure 1. Ten (10) leading causes of cancer deaths amongst males in Nigeria (WHAO projections for 2005).**



**Figure 2.** Pre & post operative prostatic specific antigen (PSA) profile in a 62-year old patient

Friends, (Dr and Mrs Bunmi Olowoyeye) residing in California, successfully conspired with close family members that the patient needed a holiday and he should come over. He sought permission, which was graciously granted by his God-sent chairman and boss, who added his words of advice that people, including doctors, should pay more attention to issues relating to their health.

The man travelled on his so-called 'holiday' and visited a clinic for another medical check-up, which this time included a prostate biopsy, and he was faced with a indisputable fact. The biopsy revealed that 3 out of the 20 samples or sites were cancererous! The PSA profile is shown in figure 2.

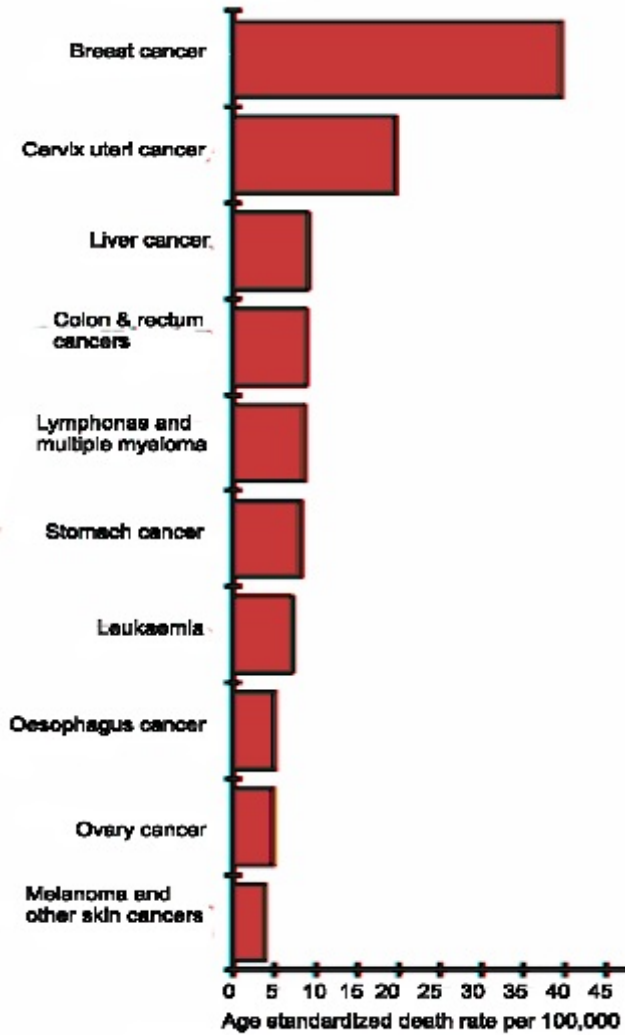


Figure 3. Ten (10) leading causes of cancer deaths amongst women in Nigeria (WHO projections for 2005).



This lecture gives me a unique opportunity to send a message across to everyone. Prostate cancer is often difficult to detect; it can hide even from brilliant doctors. The challenges are obvious: that we should take issues of prevention much more seriously. What can we do to sustain this lesson, to honour our brother, uncle, friend and father? We must pass the message on: male or female, 'GO FOR SCREENING!'

### CONCLUSION

The ideas and ways of nation building are known by many Nigerians. The implementation of noble ideas often fails; hence, chaos in our societies. Osuntokun came, trained and retrained many who are today serving as ambassadors for positive change in Nigeria. The lessons from this great scholar should remain indelible.

Professor Oluwakayode Osuntokun died at Evelyn Hospital, Cambridge on the 22nd September, 1995, but his research is still relevant to Nigeria and lives on in his students. We should all thrive and work together to preserve the monumental legacies of our superman of health care delivery and research.

God bless us all.

Ase yi s'amodun o!

*Christ is our Cornerstone  
On Him alone we build.*

- J. Chandler (1806-1876)

### **FURTHER READING**

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