Prof Michael Akintayo Bankole: A Gentle Giant and Pioneer Paediatric Surgeon in Nigeria



Make haste, slowly.

– Prof MA Bankole 4th APSON Lecture: The hands that rock the cradle rules the world. Ife 2004

My first contact with Prof Bankole was during the 4th Association of Paediatric Surgeons of Nigeria (APSON) conference held in Ile Ife. I was a senior registrar at the time and my respected and revered trainer – Prof Olusanya Adejuyigbe who at the time was the President-elect of APSON had spoken so highly of the lecturer who doubled as his trainer. He had informed us that Prof Bankole is the first trained Paediatric Surgeon from Nigeria who returned from the US first to become the pioneer paediatric surgeon at the University College Hospital, Nigeria's First Teaching Hospital, and moved over to Ile Ife in 1972 to start the speciality there. One of the lasting impressions on meeting this gentle giant was his palpable humility – here was someone who had 'seen it all' and yet interacted with mere mortals like us with infectious humour and soothing candour. The second striking quality was his power of communication in the English language. He chose his words carefully, spoke fluently and slowly with measured stresses on tones and voices to allow his audience ruminate and digest his words. His communication style emphasises the mantra 'that as a doctor, you must communicate not only to be understood, but in such a way that it is difficult to be misunderstood'.



Early Years and Medical Training

Prof MA Bankole was born on 15 December 1932 to parents from Akure in Ondo State in Southwest Nigeria. He had his primary education at St Thomas' Anglican School, Akure, 1940–1945, and St David's Anglican School, Akure, 1947, before he proceeded to the Government College Ibadan where he had his secondary education from 1948 to 1953. He thereafter attended Nigeria's Premier University - University College (now University of Ibadan), Ibadan, from 1953 to 1960 for his undergraduate studies. He finished top of his class and got the Gold Medal for the class. His performance was so brilliant that the visiting Professor from the US for the examinations invited him over to his institution for a visit.

His Postgraduate Residency Training was in the USA, 1962–1968. He trained at the Massachusetts Children's Hospital under Dr Benhard along with his colleague Dr Helen Parker who remained a family friend till his death. He also trained at the Maine Medical Centre, Portland, Maine, and later moved to the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, as a fellow in paediatric surgery from 1967 to 68. His picture, shown above, is till on the walls of the Nationwide Children's Hospital till date.

He returned to Nigeria to become the pioneer Nigerian paediatric surgeon at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, before going back to Boston Children's Hospital, Massachusetts, where he carried out a series of experimental studies.

Contributions to Paediatric Surgery

Prof MA Bankole is a thorough-bred scholar and academician. His early experimental studies on the development of an experimental model for functional cardiac replacement[1] which is the prototype of an artificial heart and collateral circulation after occlusion of the renal vein have contributed to our understanding of the circulatory system in children.[2] Prof Bankole was one of the first indigenous Nigerian surgeons to document experience in the separation of conjoint twins in Nigeria.[3] He single handedly developed the speciality of paediatric surgery at the University College Hospital and Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals' Complex in Ile Ife and thus spread over the whole nation. His first trainee at OAUTHC – Prof Olusanya Adejuyigbe – rose to become the 2nd President of the APSON and turned OAUTHC to be a foremost training centre in Nigeria and the West African subregion. A modest estimate is that close to half of all paediatric surgeons in Nigeria have a link to Ile Ife due to the robust and rugged foundation laid by Prof Bankole.

Following the qualification of Dr Adejuyigbe as a bona fide paediatric surgeon in 1985, Prof Bankole, retired but not tired, became the pioneer Registrar for the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria. The College has produced close to 10,000 fellows in all specialities of Medicine in Nigeria. The impressive and excellent output of Nigerian fellows in diaspora is a testament to the infallible foundation laid for the College by the pioneer Registrar. Until recently, many trainees from West, Central and Northern Africa came to Nigeria for training returning to their countries to reduce the shortfall in post-graduate medical education. As a result of these achievements, National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria gave him her highest award of Distinguished Fellow of the Medical College in 2016.

Some of his appointments and membership of professional bodies are listed below:

- Instructor, Paediatric Surgery, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA, 1967–1968
- Lecturer, Paediatric Surgery, University College Hospital, Ibadan, 1968–1969
- Senior Lecturer, UCH, Ibadan, 1969–1970
- Fellow, Cardiovascular Research, Harvard University, USA, 1970–1971
- Locum Consultant, Paediatric Surgery, 1971–1972
- Foundation Staff, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ife, 1972
- Professor of Paediatric Surgery, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, 1972
- Consultant, Paediatric Surgeon, Ife University Teaching Hospital, Ile-Ife, 1972–1985
- Second Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ife, 1975–1979
- Foundation College Registrar, National Post Graduate Medical College of Nigeria, 1985–1991
- He worked with Lagos State University Teaching Hospital in the Surgical Department till his retirement in 2016.

Membership of Professional Bodies/ Qualifications

- Fellow, Nigerian Medical Council in Surgery, 1970
- Fellow, International College of Surgeons, 1971
- Fellow, American Association of Paediatricians, 1972
- Fellow, West African College of Surgeons, 1972
- Fellow, American College of Surgeons, 1974
- Member, British Association of Paediatric Surgeons.

Prof Michael Akintayo Bankole came, saw and conquered. He is regarded by many as the father of Paediatric Surgery in Nigeria. Many of his philosophies are still being passed down the generations – if you are in the business of taking care of children who require surgery – you must make haste (as you cannot waste time) but do so slowly, so you pay attention to all the details of care.

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