

CITATION

PROFESSOR KELSEY ATANGAMUERIMO HARRISON

Professor Kelsey Atangamuerimo Harrison was born in Abonnema, Rivers State, Nigeria on 9th January, 1933. After his primary education in that town he won a full scholarship in 1946 to Government College, Umuahia. From there he gained admission as a college scholar to read medicine at the University College, Ibadan and University of London, 1951-58.

On the completion of his course, he chose the field of obstetrics and Gynecology as his area of specialization. He became a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (MRCOG) in 1964, a Fellow of the Nigerian Medical Council in Obstetrics and Gynecology (FMCOG) 1971, a Fellow of the West African College of Surgeons (FWACS) in 1973 and a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (FRCOG) in the same year. His professional and academic career has been in the best institutions in this Country - University of Ibadan 1960-72, Ahmadu Bello University, 1972-1981, University of Port-Harcourt, 1981 to date.

He rose to become a professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Ibadan in 1972, and in that same year moved to the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria to head the department there.

His main research interest is improving maternal health especially during all stages of pregnancy. Working as a member of a research team at the University of Ibadan, he contributed to the discovery that sickle cell disease is a most dangerous threat to maternal and fetal lives among a large percentage of the African population. The Ibadan team also devised a system for the effective management of pseudo toxemia which has gained world-wide recognition and remains today the standard treatment of this life-threatening condition. Another closely related effort to safeguard the lives of pregnant Women was Professor Harrison's development of a new technique for blood transfusion in severe anemia in pregnancy.

This technique again has also gained wide acceptance in the management of that condition.

But it is his work with and patient care of pregnant women in Zaria which have brought him the greatest recognition and attention.

In 1972 when he took over the leadership of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Ahmadu Bello University, some 3,260 women had their babies in the Teaching Hospital with many dying because of obstetrics fistula. Within six years of his research work, although the number of women having their babies in the Teaching Hospital had risen to 7000, not one of them came to die of this condition. Indeed, Ahmadu Bello University came to be well known for providing the best management for women with vesico-vaginal fistula in Nigeria. These women without hope were given new hope and a chance to live useful lives.

Kelsey Harrison's interest in maternal health went beyond the confines of the hospital and spread to the larger community. His pioneering efforts in social epidemiology of child-bearing at the Ahmadu Bello Teaching Hospital in which he organized the keeping of accurate records of all 22,774 consecutive births which took place in that hospital between January 1976 and June 1979 provided useful data on the child-bearing profile in Zaria.

The problems of early teenage marriage, obstetric fistula, maternal mortality and women's inferior status became apparent and the attention of the community and policy makers became drawn to these problems in an attempt to find appropriate solutions. Success in all these rather sensitive areas of maternal health could, however, be achieved only through team work and it is to Professor Harrison's credit that he was able to assemble a team of sociologists, social workers, home economists, agricultural extension workers, media personnel and Women's organizations to work with him in sensitizing the community to the attendant problems.

Such combination of scholarship and its practical application to solve serious health problems could not but attract attention. Indeed, the scholar, Kelsey Harrison ensured that he documented his findings in learned journals, public lectures, special studies and monographs. Other countries and international institutions therefore came to call on his expertise and knowledge. He was visiting

Professor at the Welsh National School of Medicine, Cardiff, United Kingdom from 1979 to 1980, Visiting Scientist at the Clinical Research Centre, Harrow, United Kingdom in 1984, adviser and consultant to the World Health Organization in Latin America, Asia, Europe, Africa, particularly, Ethiopia from 1984 to 1986. The world of scholarship made up of his peers also acknowledged and highlighted his contribution. The incidence and treatment of vesico vaginal fistula reported by two members of his team, gave rise to an editorial and a commentary in the prestigious British Medical Journal, Lancet in 1981 and 1983. Again, as if in anticipation of today's ceremony the 1987 issue of that journal carried another editorial on his work in the field of maternal and child health. Within that same year, one more feather was added to his cap with the award of the George Macdonald Medal "in recognition of outstanding research leading to the improvement of health in tropical countries". Professor Harrison is the first African, and the first professor of obstetrics and gynecology, to receive this award which was made jointly by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. To cap these achievements, the Federal Military Government and the Council of the University of Port-Harcourt have in recognition not only of his scholarship but also of his administrative ability and his awareness of the need for a multi disciplinary approach to the solution of our national problems appointed him Vice-Chancellor of that University •

The Board of Trustees of the Nigerian National Merit Award is pleased to present this distinguished and dedicated medical scientist, a humane worker, an effective administrator and an outstanding sportsman, Professor Kelsey Atangamuerimo Harrison to Mr. President as eminently qualified to be accorded the Nigerian National Merit Award in recognition of his distinguished contribution to medicine.