

Tribute
of
PROFESSOR BABATUNDE O. OSOTIMEHIN
(Editor, African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences - 1996 - 2003)

Gaudemus igitur, Gaudemus igitur!!

We are gathered here today in honour of a worthy Alumnus and a past Provost of this College of Medicine. I have the special privilege of welcoming to this occasion our special guests, who are connected in a special way with the deceased as we do.

I wish to recognise and welcome all our distinguished members of staff to this Special College Assembly Convened with the sole purpose of celebrating the life of a former Provost of the College of Medicine.

I warmly welcome the dear wife of the departed, Mrs. Olufunke Osotimehin, the children and indeed the entire family. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity given the College to play this part in paying respect to a man deserving honour. The news of death of this foremost Clinician came as a shock to the College, University and indeed the entire nation. Late Professor Babatunde O. Osotimehin who was much loved and fondly referred to as **'Bob'** will be greatly missed.

Ars longa, Vita brevis - For life is short, but art is long.

With this phrase Greek philosophers challenged our thoughts about life and death whenever it comes as it must, because in the end the essence of life is not how long it was, but how creative, or impactful, a life had been. From all we have heard about our much loved Professor since his demise, it is safe to say that, whilst it would appear that the length of his life was relatively short, his creativity in living it has ensured that the art of his life will indeed be long. This as he has left many legacies in the various stages of his life, in the places he worked, and with the people he met.

His spent his longest time in the College of Medicine, from his medical student days till death (50 years in all), and what a time. We have been told he was a brilliant student, who did not appear to be an 'effico'. We have heard that he not only acquired the competencies to diagnose the best life-partner for him with just one short-case sitting of the particular derrière on his knees, on the back seat of a crowded car in the dark; but also those with which he found, clerked and investigated that partner at the Scala laboratories one year later; as well as the skills he managed her with successfully for the next 44 years. What a guy!!! What a well-trained student!!



Professor Babatunde O. Osotimehin
OON, MD, FWACP, FRCP, FAS
1948 - 2017

We have been reminded that Professor Babatunde Osotimehin was a brilliant man of ‘molecules’, an accomplished scholar and Provost before he ‘found his calling’ as international social scientist, civil servant and ambassador which position he had first desired at the age of 19. In those testimonies, one caught a hint that the various groups were trying espouse what their part of his life contributed to his legacy. But indeed, a closer look at molecules indicate that Bob was being Bob as he moved determinedly, from one effortlessly executed posting of life to the other. This is because from studying molecules you learn that all life is just a transformation of one type energy to another as is demonstrated by the cell cycle which is the basis of life. In this ever-continuing process, nature is at its best as it transforms cells from one stage to another without losing energy, and even when the cell dies the process of its demise is energy-efficient as all its components are resorbed and used by other cells - its progeny. Late Professor Osotimehin had also learned from his time in the molecular laboratory that the life and death of a cell is determined by surrounding cells and is dependent on its environment. This theory was proven first by Schelhammer in 1904 when he showed that a cell isolated from others quickly died not matter the amount of nutrients in its immediate milieu. It was further elucidated by Chung, Cunha and others in the early 1990 when they showed that a normal cell placed amongst cancerous neighbors becomes cancerous, whilst a cancerous cell placed amongst normal neighbors reverts to a normal cell. Realizing his qualities, this understanding may have contributed in part to Professor Osotimehin’s decision to redirect his efforts from the relatively small environment of the laboratory and the University to the larger field of international health in his quest to make his society better in as large a scale as possible and thus ensure his own well-being. His success at this task has of course been laid bare over the past month.

From the above and other testimonies we can conclude that this Professor’s life was made up of a heterogeneous collection of Shakespearean acts with this world as his stage. From his birth in a country of the Tempest, his Macbethian pre-destination, through his emulation of the toasts of Romeo and the nimbleness of the elves of A Midsummer’s night dream in his admirable waltzes through his academic and political careers; and finally his Hamlet-like exit from the stage. The art in his life, which has inevitably made him a legend, can only be admired but not copied, and this is perhaps a welcome comfort to his successors who would rather not be measured by the yard-stick his achievements.

Mrs. Osotimehin and the rest of the Osotimehin family and friends here present, distinguished audience of this Special Academic Assembly, the first of its kind for a departed Provost, it is true that Professor Osotimehin’s candle has gone out and that his body will soon leave this institution for ever, we are however assured that through his works and deeds, the light of his legacy will continue to illuminate our hallowed chambers and corridor of academe eternally, and the name ‘Bob’ will be remembered in this citadel of learning for more than a life time.

We pray that his soul will rest in the peace of his Lord, and that that peace will abide with his family, friends, students and mentees forever.

Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, by the grace of God the 4th Provost of the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, 1990-1994. *Requiescat* in Pace.

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*Tribute read at the Special College Assembly
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