

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH DR E. OSAGIE EHANIRE, MD, FWACS, ON THE OCCASION OF NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS' FORUM ON THE ELIMINATION OF CERVICAL CANCER IN NIGERIA HELD ON 26TH JUNE, 2020.

PROTOCOL

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to give the keynote address at this very important stakeholders' forum on the elimination of cervical cancer in Nigeria. I am particularly pleased with the participation of various Partners and experts in various specialties involved in the management of cervical cancer in Nigeria.

2. As you may be aware, this forum has been planned to hold in two phases; this virtual phase and later an in-person phase after the lockdown to control the spread of the novel corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic is fully lifted. Let me use this opportunity to thank everyone who have been involved in one way or the other in combating the pandemic in Nigeria. I am optimistic that we shall come out of it with a success story by the grace of God. There is no gainsaying that the pandemic has distorted our plans as a nation particularly in the health sector. This is probably responsible for our inability to fully implement some of the strategic plans especially those that are time bound. One of such plans is the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Cancer of the Cervix (2017-2021).

3. It is pertinent to reiterate that the leadership of the Federal Ministry of Health under my watch is determined to spare no effort in ensuring that the global call for the eradication of cervical cancer by the year 2030 is achieved in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons that I decided to be at this meeting and to personally present this keynote address amidst other equally important engagements.

4. This stakeholders' forum is timely since it is holding barely one year to the expiration of the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Cancer of the Cervix (2017-2021). It is imperative to state that its implementation essentially started after the launch in 2019. The main objective of this meeting is therefore for relevant stakeholders to review the implementation of the strategic plan, identify gaps and recommend ways forward.

5. I am pleased to know that an overview of the strategic plan and the status of implementation will be presented to you. However, it is also necessary to inform you about the national response and key activities that we are embarking on for the attainment of cervical cancer free Nigeria by the year 2030.

6. It is no longer news that cancer of the cervix is the second commonest cancer in women globally and it is the leading cause of cancer mortality in Nigeria. With a total population of about 200 million people, Nigeria has about 40 million women aged 15 years and older who are at risk of developing cervical cancer. Available data indicates that the incidence of cervical cancer in Nigeria is about 33/100,000 and an estimated 14,089 are diagnosed every year, with eight out of every ten of them presenting at an advance stage resulting in a mortality rate of about 25%. In order to reverse this trend, we have made efforts to increase our national capacity for prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment of precancerous and cancerous lesions of the cervix in Nigeria.

National Response

7. The National Strategic Plan for Prevention of Cancer of the Cervix provides a strategic direction for a national response to nib the scourge of cervical cancer in Nigeria in the bud. It includes guidance on how to increase awareness on cancer of the cervix, screening and prevention, training of health care providers, vaccination against Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), treatment of pre-cancerous lesions as well as monitoring and evaluation. It also defines roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and advocates integration of prevention of cancer of the cervix into reproductive health services at the primary health care level.

8. In furtherance of the implementation of the plan, the Federal Ministry of Health has taken steps to commence national immunization programme against human papilloma virus (HPV) which is responsible for over 70% of cervical cancer and to increase screening campaigns hitherto conducted at the tertiary hospitals, through some individuals and non-governmental organizations and partners. The Federal Ministry of Health conducted a pilot immunization against HPV in 2011 which was one of the requirements for its integration into the National Programme on Immunization. The National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA) has assured me that HPV immunization will be introduced on a national scale in 2021. As a government, we appreciate those of you who have been very active in the area of secondary prevention. I must therefore specially appreciate all our partners in this forum that working tirelessly to increase screening and treatment of precancerous lesions across the country.

9. I am glad to inform you that the Federal Ministry of Health is collaborating with the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) to scale up secondary prevention of cervical cancer in three states namely: Lagos, Rivers and Kaduna through a Unitaid- funded Programme. This Programme should have commenced in May this year but for the Covid-

19 outbreak. I am aware that various partners are implementing the United States Center for Disease Control (US/CDC) funded HIV integrated cervical Cancer screening. This is also commendable.

10. Furthermore, majority of our tertiary hospitals currently have the capacity to perform PAP smear, colposcopy, biopsy and histopathology services essential for diagnosis of cervical cancer. Electrosurgical excision procedures such as Loop electrosurgical excision procedure/ Large loop excision of transformation zone (LEEP/LLETZ) and cold coagulation are also available in some of our centres.

11. The government of Nigeria has continued to upgrade Hospitals through budgetary allocation as well as public private partnership (PPP) arrangement to provide equipment such as, Mammography machines, Colposcopes, MRIs, linear Accelerators and other radiotherapy equipment for the provision of specialized treatment of cancers including cancer of the cervix. The Federal Ministry of Health is in a partnership programme with the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) and the American Cancer Society (ACS) to provide quality cancer chemotherapy at over 50% cost reduction. Some of these drugs are also used for the treatment of cervical cancer.

12. With late presentation and diagnosis of cancer cases, many of these patients may need palliative care. Palliative care is a holistic care and an approach to care given to persons with life limiting disease that focuses on pain and symptom control for patients and family support throughout the course of illness until death and even in their bereavement. In order to address the palliative care need of these patients, I have approved the development of a National Palliative Care Policy and the process has commenced.

13. The Federal Ministry of Health is engaging several partners towards successful cancer prevention efforts in Nigeria. This stakeholder forum is a product of such partnership. The John Hopkins International Vaccine Access Center (IVAC) is facilitating this forum to enable us review the National Strategic Plan for the prevention of cancer of the cervix in Nigeria.

14. In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, permit me to emphasize that my expectations this forum are the revision of the level of implementation of the strategic objectives, identification of the gaps therein and charting the way forward towards ensuring a cervical cancer free Nigeria.

15. Finally , it is my hope that the technical sessions will be very robust and will yield the desired outcomes. I wish you very fruitful deliberations and I thank you for your attention.