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SECRET

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MEMORANDUM OF THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH FOR THE APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL EAR CARE PROGRAMME.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to seek Council's approval for the adoption and implementation of a National Ear Care Programme and Provision of free Hearing Aids to Public School Students in Nigeria towards a Strengthened Health System for Delivery of Essential Health Care Services.

INTRODUCTION

2. Background

Hearing impairment is a silent disability with varying degree of severity ranging from mild to profound hearing impairment. An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, can adversely affect a child's educational performance.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 360 million people globally suffer from disabling hearing loss, out of which 328 million are adult and 32 million are children under the age of 15 years. This report further states that about 60% of these cases are due to preventable causes ranging from wax impaction to Otitis media in children. Over 80% of those living with hearing loss live in low and middle income countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of hearing loss in children has been estimated at 1.9% (Mulwafu, Kuper & Ensink, 2016).

In Nigeria, there is a dearth of literature on the prevalence of hearing loss. However, it has been estimated that Nigeria has about 3.5 million children with hearing loss and 75% of these cases are of preventable causes.

3. Situation Analysis

Due to the alarmingly disturbing statistics, Starkey Foundation seeks to reflect care and improve lives around the world by providing the gift of hearing to people who live in a silent world. Starkey Hearing Foundation (SHF) is a U.S based non-governmental organization founded by William F. Austin since 1984 with a vision "so the world would hear" as a counteraction against the increasing burden of hearing loss across the globe. The Foundation has successfully carried out community-based hearing health programmes in 59 low and middle-income countries using WHO training resources on primary ear and hearing care as well as other standardized manuals.

In Nigeria, Starkey Hearing Foundation has worked in partnership with Olusegun Obasanjo Foundation as well as six state Governments. These programmes have benefitted approximately 5,000 persons amongst which 4,000 of them were fitted with free hearing aids.

In line with the resolutions of the World Health Assembly May 2017 on the prevention of deafness, Starkey Hearing Foundation has proposed to collaborate with the Federal Ministry of Health to conduct a Screening Programme for One Million School Children. This Screening programme for children is to serve as a baseline assessment to:

- Identify the level of hearing impairment among school children in Nigeria;
- Prevent hearing loss amongst children in Nigeria;
- Identify the number of children suspected to be at risk of developing a hearing loss; and
- Early detection of children already suffering from Educationally Significant Hearing Loss (ESHL).

The Screening exercise would involve ear and hearing screening, while children identified to require primary ear and hearing services will be attended to immediately and those needing secondary and/or tertiary ear care would be referred appropriately.

4. ISSUES AND JUSTIFICATION

Hearing loss is an invisible health condition which as a result makes it under-treated and may result in a lifelong condition. Reports have shown that hearing impairments in children places them at risk of developing psychological problems, academic underachievement, and limited employment opportunities etc. all of which lead to a decline in the standard of living experienced. (Ciorba 2012; Hogan 2013; WHO 2016)

It is alarming to know that the increasing number of people suffering from varying forms of hearing loss and how it affects their ability to carry out simple day-to-day activities. There is a need for Nigeria to actively play her part towards achieving the vision of the World Health Organization of having a world in which no person experiences hearing loss due to preventable causes and those with unavoidable hearing loss can achieve their full potential through appropriate interventions, education and empowerment.

5. PRAYERS

The Council is hereby invited to note that:

- There is currently no existing National Strategic Health Policy on the improvement of hearing healthcare services in Nigeria;
- With a fast growing national population estimated at 180 million people, there is only one Federal Ear care Centre which is grossly insufficient;
- There is lack of statistical analysis to support the level of morbidity associated with hearing impairment; and
- There is need to institutionalize public health interventions towards reducing the prevalence of hearing loss in Nigeria.
- That the Starkey Hearing Foundation has proposed to collaborate with the FMOH to conduct a hearing impairment Screening Programme for One Million School Children in Nigeria and this screening will serve as a baseline for identifying and correcting hearing impairment.

The Council is further invited to approve:

- Development of a National Ear Health Policy and a National Strategic Plan for Ear Care towards improving hearing health services in Nigeria;
- A National Ear/Hearing Screening Programme for public school children in Nigeria (2 million ears in 12 months) in collaboration with the Starkey Hearing Foundation;
- The provision of free Hearing Healthcare services with hearing aids; and
- Training of Hearing Healthcare workers by Starkey Hearing Foundation across the States.

Honourable Minister of Health

JUNE, 2018