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MEMORANDUM OF THE HONOURABLE COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH, ABIA STATE ON ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TELE-HEALTH INITIATIVE AS A MEANS OF INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN NIGERIA: THE ABIA STATE EXAMPLE

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to keep Council abreast of the adoption and level of implementation of the tele-health initiative in Abia state.

Background

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 highlights the pertinence of achieving universal health coverage for all by 2030. As at December 2016, the country recorded 154 million active telephony users. Nigeria presently has a record tele density of 110.4%, defining tele density as the number of active telephone connections per 100 inhabitants living within a target area. Abia State's telecoms market caters to almost 4 million active subscribers. The tremendous reach and substantial influence of telecommunication technology over almost all areas of our daily living, has ultimately made it an indispensable component with the potential to impact beyond our social lifestyle.

The Abia tele- health initiative ABSTHi), is an indigenous inventiveness that leverages on simple and available telecommunication technology, hence the term "Tele-Health". The current access (35 – 45%) to basic, quality health care services in Nigeria pales in comparison to the exponential growth being witnessed in the telecommunications sector. This strongly positions the ubiquitous telecommunications technology as a veritable tool to drive other sectors service delivery, including health.

ROLL OUT OF THE INITIATIVE IN ABIA STATE BY THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA ON 12TH APRIL, 2018.

The Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, physically rolled out the initiative on 12th April, 2018, at the International Conference Centre, Umuahia.

The cardinal objectives of the telehealth initiative in the state include:

- i. To leverage on simple and available technology to improve quantity (access) and quality (outcome) of healthcare service, so that any person with a mobile phone, irrespective of the presence of a health institution or their proximity to one, is able to benefit remotely from a virtual healthcare system through transfer of simple health information vis a vis healthcare services;
- ii. To advance simple health knowledge, attitude, practice and skill to health care workers and other individuals who for real reasons (lack of resources like money, time, human or infrastructural capital etc.) will ordinarily forego seeking clinical options for less palatable alternatives; and
- iii. To increase public awareness to public health matters, whether routine (like immunization), or non-routine (like newly emerging disease threats) events through targeted/mass dissemination of public or personal health information/intelligence to diverse or target population or person.

The Abia State Tele-Health Initiative (ABSTHi) call center is manned by medical doctors (general/specialists) who provide services in response to demand. The state in collaboration with the vendor and MTN produced customised call cards with which the patient calls a doctor and accesses prompt quality care irrespective of where they are, hence the tag 'dial a doctor'. Services presently include:

- a. Remote supervisory clinical healthcare support services to Primary Health Care providers in local communities in Abia State, connecting local primary health care providers to reliable, up-to-date clinical resources in the form of informal training and integrated supervisory support; thus advancing their knowledge, attitude, practice and skills towards making better health outcomes.
- b. Connection between local residents in Abia State to their local primary healthcare providers ensuring access to correct health information, education and care towards self-empowerment, simply because people do better when they know better,

AbSTHi also connects PHCs to their own permanent telecommunication identity, so that, despite operational and infrastructural maneuvers (facility relocation, personnel transfer etc.) this identity remains the same, guaranteeing long term sustainability of communication and constant connectivity to healthcare.

Prayers

Council is invited to note:

1. That simple and available telecommunication like simple telephone can be leveraged on to improve access to (quantity) and enhance content of (quality) healthcare services;
2. That reliable, up-to-date clinical resources in the form of informal training and integrated supervisory support can be provided to local primary health care providers through telecommunication; thus advancing their knowledge, attitude, practice and skills towards making better health outcomes;
3. That connection between local residents to their local primary healthcare providers through telecommunication is possible, ensuring access to correct health information, education and care; and

Council is further invited to:

Approve the adoption and implementation of the Abia State Tele-Health Initiative in other states and FCT.

Hon. Commissioner for Health, Abia State.

May 2018