

REFLECTIONS: CHARACTER AND RESPONSIBILITY OF A FELLOWSHIP HOLDER IN COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES; ADAPTED FROM A TRAINING PROGRAMME FACILITATED BY ME IN JUNE 2020 AT THE LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY

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Dear Fellow.

One or more of the Colleges set up for the purposes in Nigeria and West Africa has now conferred on you its Fellowship in one or more of the branches of Clinical and or Laboratory Medicine following your successful completion of prescribed training modules and success at specified examinations. This validation confirms that you may practise as a consultant in that branch of medicine and also hold university academic appointments up to all levels where you will also be expected to carry out research and render services to the community. Should you elect to pursue an academic career, in the responsibility of offering services to the community outside those of teaching and research, it will be expected of you to add value in diverse ways to human societies and to advance the course of humanity, using the knowledge and skills you have acquired. Here, you are more likely to be successful if you have also acquired some character traits of decency, integrity, hard work and those positive values that enhance human relationship.

Preferred Attributes

A Fellowship holder should be measured and temperate and in addition, exercise self-discipline and moderation in all that he or she does. For instance, should he or she elect to take alcohol, it should be in done in moderation and he or she

should not be drunk under any circumstance.

Furthermore, conversant with the deleterious effects of cigarette smoking on humans, smoking

should be a taboo to such a person. Dressing should be elegant and simple and not shabby, ostentatious, seductive, or explicit. Fear of God, humility, respect and consideration for others, punctuality and trustworthiness are some other positive attributes Fellowship holders should cultivate. The homes of such persons should be tranquil and fights between spouses should be avoided.

These virtuous qualities will not only enable Fellowship holders to live respectable lives, they will also assist them to deliver services that are appropriate within the university, at the home environment, within their states, in their countries of origin and beyond. I will expatiate on services in each of these communities, drawing parallels from the services that I have rendered in my 45 years of academic and professional career.

Services to Your University Community

Outside the academic ranks of lecturer 1 to professorship, academic staff have the opportunity of serving the university community through membership of many committees, headship of departments, deanship of faculties or provostship of Colleges, vice chancellorship of universities, pro-chancellorship and chairmanship or membership of governing councils of various universities in addition to offering professional services such as in medical care. I have been fortunate to have held all those positions in the Nigerian University System (NUS) at one time or the other. Integrity, transparency, and hard work are crucial as it is these

elements that would enable your colleagues to elect you to those positions that are normally filled through balloting. Once elected, you should justify the confidence placed in you by, as much as possible doing only those things that are edifying and would promote the overall interest of the institution.

As head of Department, the sanctity of semester and degree examinations should not be compromised in any way. You should lead by examples as the Dean of the Faculty or Provost of the College and work hard and be humble as the vice-chancellor of the institution. As much as possible be punctual to scheduled events and read your minutes and other documents before attending meetings which you have to chair or participate in. As much as lies within your power, take prompt and appropriate actions on all issues including responding to official mails especially those that bother on the welfare of staff and students. Always remind yourself that power is ephemeral and that you would leave the seat you occupy someday. So, seek to do your best to leave a good legacy.

As Pro-chancellor and chairman of council be amiable but strict and hold the vice-chancellor and administration to account as may be appropriate. But do not constitute yourself or the council which you chair into a parallel government to run side by side that of the university because it is the vice-chancellor and not you as Pro-chancellor, that has the mandate to run the day-to-day affairs of the university.

Services to Your Hometown

If, like me, you are fortunate to have the location of your primary place of assignment close to your hometown, your home community may expect you to be involved in their affairs to some extent and to render some community services, particularly if they consider you to be a person of

integrity and good character. You should not shy away completely from such services especially when they are designed to improve the quality of life of people in those communities. Your Fellowship qualification is not meant for you to deride and feel ashamed of your people and their customs. Rather,

it should encourage you to mingle with them and let them benefit from the knowledge and skills you have acquired. You may be invited to deliver talks to enlighten the community on issues of current affairs or help raise funds for good causes such as scholarships, environmental sanitation, and health matters. Since I transferred my services from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria to the University of Port Harcourt in 1980, I have lived in Port Harcourt which is about 45 minutes' drive to my home town, Abonnema, once a thriving seaport, on the estuary of the Sombriero River in Akukutoru Local Government Area of Rivers State in Nigeria. I have delivered keynote addresses on important occasions and chaired rallies for fund raising.

When in your home community, show respect to all especially those that are older. As much as possible, speak the local language and dress like those at home. Eat the local food and when you can afford it, put up a modest residential accommodation to enable you spend time at home in your community.

Services to Your State of Origin

As stated earlier, I have lived in Port Harcourt, which is the capital of my home state – the Rivers State of Nigeria since 1980. Over these past forty years, I have had the privilege of being invited by the State Government to serve in several important capacities, while still in the university as a university teacher. I could not honour all the invitations for personal reasons, but I accepted and served in a few important ones.

Academics serving in state governments not uncommonly encounter difficulties because scandals occur from time to time especially where governments feel that the actions of their appointees are not in sync with government's political aspirations. Therefore, academics who undertake to serve in state governments should do so with caution and should as much as possible, refrain from political alignments, unless of course they intend to go fully into politics. They should exhibit a high index of probity and accountability and should keep records of what they do, especially, financial transactions.

Services to the Country

Again, I have had several opportunities to serve my country in different capacities, outside my responsibilities of teaching and conducting research in the university. I have served as the Secretary General of the Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics of Nigeria (SOGON), an umbrella organisation of obstetricians and gynaecologist, committed to the pursuits of the rights of women to achieve the highest possible standards of health, including sexual and reproductive health. I led the Association of vice-chancellors of all Nigerian universities as well as those of the federal government in addition to representing Nigeria on the council of vice-chancellors of Commonwealth Universities. Furthermore, I have delivered convocation lectures to several universities and served as pro-chancellor and chairman of council of two universities in addition to serving as the chairman of the Boards of the National Hospital Abuja and the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Benincity. I delivered the 20th Sir Samuel Manuwa Memorial Lecture of the West African College of Surgeons and the 50th Anniversary Lecture of the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria. I am currently a member of Strategy Advisory Committee (STRADVCOM), an advisory body to the National Universities Commission.

When you are called upon to serve in such responsible positions in the future, people will expect you to be knowledgeable, reliable and trustworthy and they will only continue to call on you to serve if they feel you would always meet these criteria.

Services at the Global Stage

I am a member of council of the West African College of Surgeons and the chairman of its endowment as well as the fund-raising committees. I have reviewed articles for publication for the *Lancet* and have served as member of the board of the *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

Summary

As you commence your career following your most deserved admission into Fellowship, your experiences will differ. You will receive congratulations on the hard work you have done over these many years that have brought you into your present position. Your attention will also be drawn to the fact that *to whom much is given, much is also required*. So, society at all levels will expect you to be exemplary in all you do. Many would advise that you continue to work hard and build a character that will make you responsible, respectable and trustworthy as these elements will enable you to leverage on the Fellowship that that has been conferred on you. Your attention will be drawn to the fact that integrity is key in the journey of life you are about to embark upon. To put it succinctly, if you stop for one moment and consider the amount of hard work and tenacity of purpose that many Fellowship holders have shown in their careers you will realise the value of integrity, trustworthiness and predictability. If you aspire to and embrace these attributes, the Fellowship will never pull you down. Rather, it will serve as a springboard from which you will leap into a successful and fulfilled life.