

# The healthcare project for Nigeria

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It was while I served at St. John's University, New York in the early 80's that I became especially troubled about the state of healthcare services in Nigeria. At first I felt quite helpless about the scope and magnitude of the problem. But I eventually decided to pursue an idea that I felt would make significant contribution to alleviation of the problem. As you can appreciate, the key to making any significant and lasting impact on the problems of healthcare in Nigeria is having a dependable source of large sums of money – not just for the development of the proper healthcare infrastructure, but also for the perpetual maintenance of the infrastructure. I decided to set up a modern drug manufacturing company which will have the capacity to earn significant sums of money, and the sensitivity to commit the profits from this enterprise to the development of the healthcare sector in Nigeria.

I still have in my files copies of letters I received from four state Governors in the United States expressing interest and outlining the benefits of locating the pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in their states. I visited their respective states, but eventually decided to locate the plant in Nigeria for only one reason: a local modern generic drug manufacturing plant in Nigeria would make available to our people a reliable source of affordable high quality essential drugs, which will markedly contribute to quality healthcare in Nigeria by alleviation of unnecessary drug scarcity. Therefore, in 1986, I resigned my appointment in New York and decided to commit large sums of money to the development of a modern drug manufacturing plant in Nigeria.

When I arrived in Nigeria, my first task was deciding a location to site the plant. My initial considerations included choosing a site near a seaport to facilitate importation of raw materials, and ultimately exportation of some of the finished products to markets outside Nigeria.

Other factors in consideration included availability of trained and responsible labor force, availability of power, clean water, telecommunication, and national transportation network for distribution of finished products. I was quite attracted to Lagos and Port Harcourt. I got my first shock when a reliable and informed friend quietly said to me: "I understand the factors you are using to select a site and they are sensible and legitimate. However, you must remember that you will import a lot of raw materials, and that import license is a very important issue. If you do not site your plant in the right state or location you will never get the import license and hard currency you need to purchase raw materials for your operations." Several people confirmed his assertion. Eventually the project was sited in Jos, Northern Nigeria, not because the location we settled for has a seaport which we needed, but because it offered the promise of import license through significant connections to the government. We established our facilities. We had a nice and very modern drug manufacturing plant. I was properly introduced by a good friend in Jos to several key people in government, especially several key ministers from Langtang.

National distribution infrastructure for pharmaceuticals, such as wholesalers, was very poor and inefficient. Therefore, selling to the federal government was attractive at the time. We put together a proposal for the ministry of defense. Fake drugs were rampant in Nigeria. We therefore proposed to manufacture private label products for the ministry of defense which will be supplied to the army, navy and air force. The first product was an analgesic branded Defadol. Benefits outlined for the ministry included:

The product will be sold only to the defense ministry. So, if it was seen on the market the ministry would have legitimate grounds to arrest such sellers. This would cut down on pilferage and diversion which were rampant problems.

Since the product was a private label brand made exclu-



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sively for the defense ministry, there will be no fears as to the quality of the product, which was significant in view of the fake drug crisis in Nigeria at the time.

Through a very elaborate process the proposal was approved by the director of medical services, the quartermaster general, and the defense minister. Before signing the contract the defense minister asked the ministry of health to analyze samples of our product and advise them if they should purchase the products. The analysis showed that the product was above reproach, and so the health ministry wrote a good letter of support for the product advising the minister of defense to proceed with final approval of the contract. The contract was therefore approved by the defense minister.

After the minister approved and signed our contract he passed it down to his permanent secretary for implementation. That was when our nightmares started. To cut a very long story short, our contract sat there for months because we refused to bribe anyone, specifically the permanent secretary. We were advised to bribe the man by some people who knew him well; otherwise the project would not move forward. My position was that the project should stand on its merit, that the permanent secretary must do his job and implement a

project that had already been approved by his boss. Little did I know that my firm position against bribery would cost me 18 months. The minister knew what was going on. He supported my position. He was embarrassed by the events. Eventually the minister through approvals by the president nego-

tiated removal of the permanent secretary; he was moved to aviation and a new permanent secretary was appointed for defense. The project was finally implemented. We manufactured and delivered the products, and submitted our invoice. Getting paid for the product was another hell. Just sign-

ing the invoice and submitting it to the defense ministry was like pulling a tooth. Apparently we were supposed to bribe someone for that. We knew the person we were supposed to bribe. We were repeatedly advised to bribe him, but we were not interested. It took at least two months for him to simply sign our invoice because we were unwilling to pay anybody. After the invoice was signed and submitted we were told there was no money to pay us for that quarter. Forty companies had already been short-listed for payment that quarter. Total sum to be paid amounted to over 40 million naira, but the total quarterly allocation released to the defense ministry by the government for payments that quarter was only 10 million naira.

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## BD Crossword 556

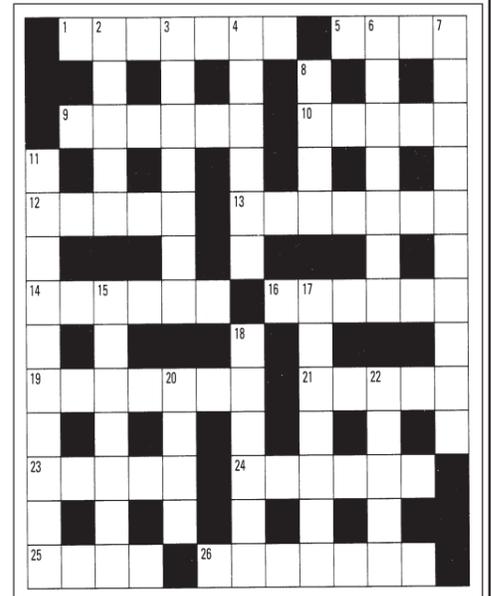
March 08, 2007

### Across

1. Flaw (7)
5. Brink (4)
9. Neckband (6)
10. Speak formally (5)
12. Stadium (5)
13. Greet (7)
14. Obstruct (6)
16. Smokey and the---, film (6)
19. Military outfit (7)
21. Adder (5)
23. Subside (5)
24. Comedy actor,---Barker (6)
25. Ebony---, Everly Brothers song (4)
26. Reduced (7)

### Down

2. Slack (5)
3. European wild duck (7)
4. Astute (6)
6. Precious stone (7)
7. Basic, fundamental (10)
8. Ballot (4)
11. Use (10)
15. Confidential (7)
17. Make headway (7)
18. Fertilised egg (6)
20. Cattle (4)
22. Vanity (5)



### Yesterday's Solutions:

**Across:** 1. Satchel, 5. Plea, 9. Adjust, 10. Tramp, 12. Manet, 13. Riposte, 14. Artery, 16. Punnet, 19. Unearth, 21. Comic, 23. Accra, 24. Bundle, 25. Ever, 26. Calypso.

**Down:** 2. Arden, 3. Counter, 4. Entire, 6. Liaison, 7. Apprentice, 8. Step, 11. Immaculate, 15. Treacle, 17. Uncanny, 18. Phobia, 20. Roar, 22. Miles.

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