

How the Chanrai family, FCT Minister are changing lives

By Felix Durumbah

There are so many feats that touch the underprivileged and vulnerable which are being accomplished by Minister of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Malam Muhammad Musa Bello, that go virtually unreported.

For instance, is there any place in FCT where those at the lowest rungs of society can go and receive free, yes, absolutely free, high quality eye-care with state-of-the-art equipment and be tended to by personnel trained abroad?

To some persons, such place does not exist in a city as capitalist oriented as Abuja. But *Abuja Digest Weekly* has unearthed such facility: the Tuls Chanrai Foundation (TCF) Eye Hospital at Kukwaba, Abuja.

Chief Operating Officer (COO) of TCF, Mr. Shrawan Kumar Kasam told *Abuja Digest Weekly* that the hospital is a beautiful example of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) wherein the Minister allotted the land measuring approximately five acres for establishment of the hospital.

On completion of work on the sprawling edifice, President Muhammadu Buhari himself commissioned it on July 11, 2019.

Mr. Kasam expressed immense gratitude to the Minister for the land and Mr. Jagdish Chanrai, Trustee and Chairman of TCF, saying the hospital is here to scale up value to lives and contribute its quota to development.

Kasam said giving back to society is a cardinal plank of the Chanrai family's principles, with their strong belief in the philosophy of 'caring capitalism'.

The hospital is initiated with an interesting model, where those who can afford for services cross-subsidize and provide free for those who cannot afford. Sounds like something out of a fictional movie, but this newspaper found out that it is indeed for real—works fine.

The hospital's policy is such that if 40 per cent of those who can afford

quality eye care services pay for their own eye ailments, the hospital should be able to accommodate 60 per cent underprivileged with free services as the foundation is a not-for-profit organization.

The hospital operates a 54-bed space accommodation with about 40 of these dedicated to society's socio-economically vulnerable persons.

A visit by the paper to the hospital showed a beehive of activities.

Responding to questions, Mr. Kasam said: "The hospital conducts out-reach camps in rural and remote areas around 100-kilometre radius of Abuja, screens patients and identifies potential patients who need surgical intervention (who otherwise would be needlessly blind).

"Once potential patients are identified, the hospital sends a vehicle to these remote locations, to transport them to hospital for tests, conducts vision restoring eye surgery (nothing less than a miracle), does post-operative follow-up and transports them back to their respective communities. All these services are provided completely free of cost to the rural and remote poor population."

Perhaps, this could be the only such health facility around where patients are transported for admission, accommodated, fed and treated free of cost to them—thanks to the generosity of those like-minded people who believe in giving back to society.

Asked what the promoters of the hospital stand to gain in all these, Kasam explained that "we're not looking for profit. What we're looking is the person who can afford the services, can provide support for those who cannot afford the services. So, it's a win-win situation for everyone—the person who can afford is getting a very affordable price and a person who cannot afford is getting it free."

According to him, the model is picking up momentum and he is

confident that it will be successful in FCT. He said, since inception, about 2200 surgeries have been carried out in the hospital alone, with 1750 being free of cost just as TCF has organized over 123,000 free eye surgeries across Nigeria in the last two decades and strongly supports the nation in addressing avoidable blindness.

Queried on the long-term vision of the hospital for Nigerians, the COO cited three goals.

He said: "Our long-time vision for this hospital are three things— we'll expand the current bed capacity of 54 beds to 100 beds. We're also envisioning that it becomes a training institute where we endeavour to train every personnel of the ophthalmic community from across the country, so that the eye care services are available, accessible and affordable for everyone. Finally, we want to see this hospital as a centre of excellence not just for Nigeria but for West Africa."

Abuja Digest Weekly was taken round different units of the hospital which possesses ultra-modern ophthalmic equipment and highly motivated and trained personnel, mostly Nigerians, busy attending to patients.

In one of the private in-patient rooms, a woman who had a plaster over her left eye, but who did not want her name in print, told *Abuja Digest Weekly* that she paid N500,000 for eye surgery, adding that a German hospital had charged her the equivalent of N2.5 million for same treatment, exclusive of flight tickets for self and one family attendant, local transportation and sundry expenses.

Another patient, Malam Saidu Lambatta, a local farmer, said he came from nearby Niger State. His son, Garba, who was in hospital with him and translated his spoken Hausa into English language, told the paper that he was brought by a bus belonging to the hospital.

Lambatta said he knew of some colleagues who had received their



President Muhammadu Buhari having a word with a patient at the commissioning, while FCT Perm. Sec., Sir Chinyeaka Ohaa (2nd right) and Chanrai Foundation officials look on.



Front view of the hospital

healing free of cost at the hospital, insisting that this was what motivated him to come for treatment.

He lauded FCT Minister for giving land for the hospital, saying such show of responsibility was the hallmark of leaders with conscience.

"Ina gai da Minister domi shi mutum kirki ne (meaning: I salute the Minister because he is a good man)," the elderly man stated.

A female patient, Mallama Asmau Badamasi, stated that since her admission "no kobo has been collected from me for treatment here. My ward is clean; beds are

comfortable, the place is well aired, and good food is served free."

Kasam said: "This hospital can be cited as a very good example of PPP because government is very much supporting us by providing this land. The hospital land is given by the FCT Minister and the hospital is built by the Chanrai family and the services have been continued with help from private organizations."

He stated that, once the hospital is consolidated and self-sustainable, TCF has plans "to establish similar hospitals in six geo-political regions of Nigeria."

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