



RIGHT TO HEALTH AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

With the recent statistics from the World's most populous black nation, Nigeria is currently having a population of 206 million people and the elder make up about 4.6% of this value (9.4million). This is far less than 10% of the entire population.

Precious Gems was privileged to have encounters with some communities in Edo State Nigeria. This encounter made us aware of the geriatric population in these regions and understand their predicament to poor access to health care and health services. A lot of the geriatric population in these communities were noticed to patronize unprofessional services for their health care rather than use the health facilities that were in the community. This lack of faith in the health facility could be due to the fact that the health facilities faced abandonment, poor management, lack of health personnels and health equipment.

In order to curb this problem and protect the human rights of these individuals, our organization alongside a Christian/ Medical Association in Edo State, teamed up to identify a gap in the rights of the elderly. Irrua/Ekpoma Axis of Edo State, Nigeria was used as a case Study location.

The elderly usually do not have personal carers as most of their children are grown and have their own small families. This places the elderly in a tight corner of caring for themselves both financially, emotionally and health wise. Precious Gems and CMDA took this opportunity of taking health care to the elderly ones at their home base. This was achieved by first doing a survey in these designated areas. A health survey done showed hypertension and diabetes Mellitus to be the prevalent cause of the elderly ill health hence the need to provide an awareness and treatment program that will empower this population to take charge of their health. Some of the ways this was done was by bringing health care to their doorsteps through medical outreaches and health awareness programs. Also, the health facility was remodeled and brought back into service, volunteer medical personnels were put in place, drugs and other health essentials were made readily available and these individuals could eventually access healthcare in their local health facility at little or no cost.

Both organizations reached out to medical doctors nearby for no cost consultations so these people can be encouraged to come and access healthcare. Drugs were made available, there was a mini mobile lab provided to run blood check, urine analysis and other basic tests. These drugs were distributed per requirement.

Provision of a Telemedicine machine was made available, and this also enabled the geriatric population to have top notch health consultations at their beck and call.

However, even as health services were provided, some more delicate cases required expert management, this was another major challenge as health insurances are not readily available to cover the expenses these residents will incur when they seek for expert care and consultation.

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This absence further breached the fundamental rights of older people to freedom, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy.

The WHO Constitution (1946) envisages “...the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right of every human being.” Acknowledging health as a human right recognizes a legal obligation on states to ensure access to timely, acceptable, and affordable health care.

As a group of people coming together in one accord to put things in the right places, there is a limit we can reach but with maximum support from the government and everyone at large we are sure to cater for every single elder in our nation. Although a lot of efforts was put into making impacts in the lives of the elderly, much work still needs to be done as it is a grey area here in Africa. The populace is still not used to their health welfare being paramount. We had a target of reaching at least 500 elderly at every outreach, however we barely got a little above half that number which was rather a little positive impact although what we had planned, hoped, and aimed to achieve was still a far cry to be reached. We are yet to break the yolk of poor health seeking behavior amongst this population. This does not only involve the older ones but however we must involve their relatives to explain the importance of good health seeking behavior. Achieving this would be able to promote the rights of older people by,

- a. Prohibiting age discrimination in the provision of goods and services
- b. Promoting a positive attitude to ageing through awareness-raising campaigns targeting the media, service providers and the general public
- c. Ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of health care and long-term care for older persons.
- d. Ensure adequate training of health-care professionals in geriatrics and establish geriatric centers throughout the territory where possible.
- e. Ensure appropriate assistance and support for older persons living in their homes, including medical and nursing care, meals on wheels and domestic assistance.
- f. Encourage volunteering by older people, both in their own country and abroad, as well as volunteering to support older persons.

Following our observations during the field work, some opinions maybe incorporated in order to protect the right of older people and this includes;

- a. Incorporate geriatric policies into the system and educational curriculum;

The first point for every child is the public school. Incorporating geriatric study and policies into educational curriculum and having the government work in tandem with schools to establish this in



the minds of the young ones in a bid of catching them young will help to teach the future generations of the importance of elderly care and rights of the elderly. These policies should be given as much importance as every other policy protecting every citizen in the country. How a country takes care of its geriatric population will determine the average lifespan of the citizens and each generation.

b. Establishing law and order, putting in place rewards and punishment.

Having a reward and punishment system that helps to check and balance the policies put in place can also drive home the point of how important the government takes elder abuse, neglect, and abandonment. The immediate families of the older people are aware of the fines and punishment attached to abandonment and lack of poor seeking health behavior for their aged parents, this will go a long way in putting some children in order.

c. Safeguarding.

Social workers, doctors, and health care staff should be readily available to protect the rights of older people. This will also need a lot of effort from government interventions and schemes.

Precious Gems will work closely with the Nigerian government to develop schemes aimed at protecting the right of the elderly against abuse, neglect, abandonment should be handled professionally. This goes beyond leaving their care in the hands of their loved ones.

d. Raising volunteers.

Involving and encouraging Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to raise volunteers not just for other aspects of health but also raising volunteers and campaigning for the older people is a path that is worthy to be charted. Involving large bodies and organizations would drive home the point of how important older people are to the nation.

e. Welfare Schemes;

Putting in place special welfare packages for the older people is another way of preserving their right to health care. As the biggest problem in seeking health care is the fund, knowing that there are welfare packages in place to cover these health expenses would encourage a good health seeking behavior in the older generation and this is very important in sustaining life of the older people.