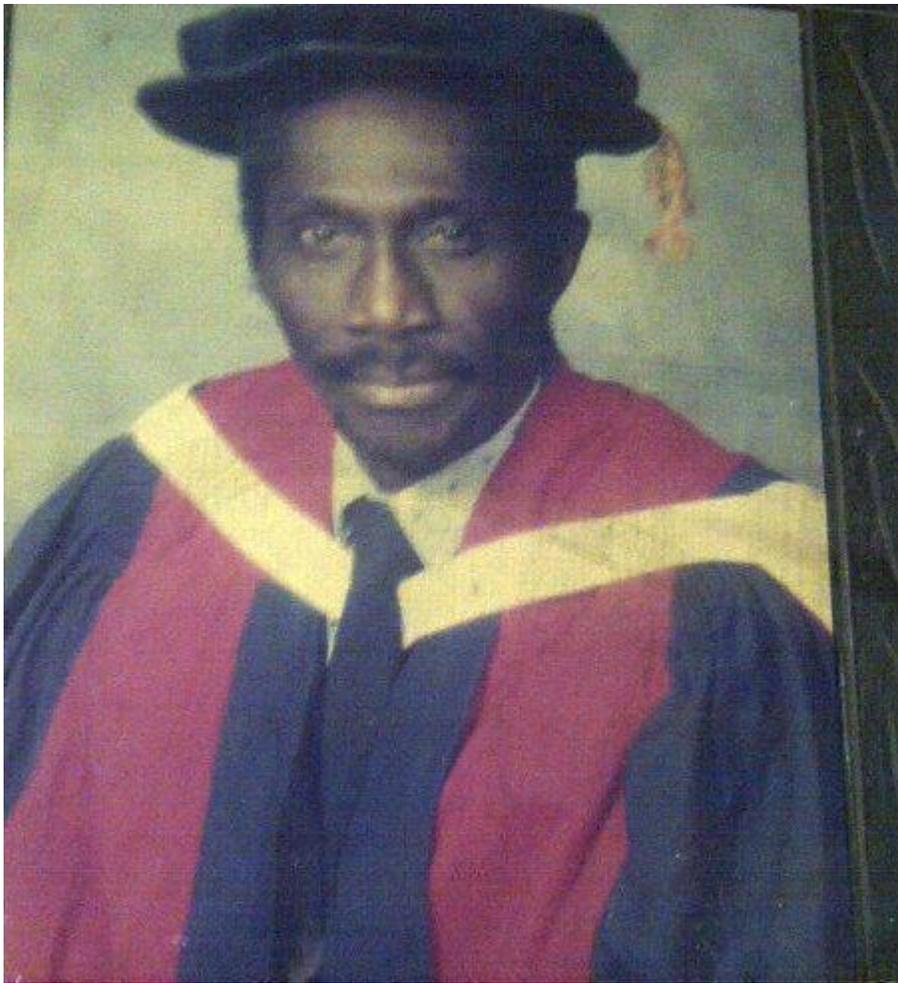


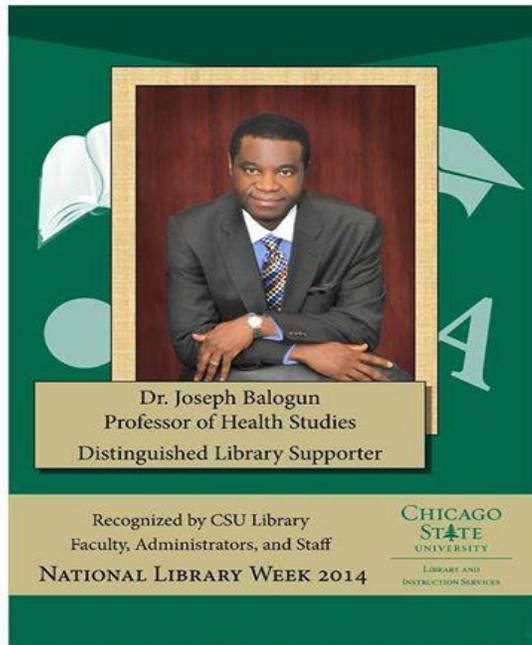
**A Special Tribute in Celebration of the Life of
Physiotherapist Icon, Professor Vincent C.B. Nwuga
By Professor Joseph A. Balogun***

**A Eulogy Presented at the
7th Annual Convention of the Ife Physical Therapy
Alumni Association held at Orlando, Florida on June
25-28, 2015**

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**Celebrating the Life of Physiotherapist Icon,
Professor Vincent C.B. Nwuga**



- Mr. President, Ife Physical Therapy Alumni Association
- Guest Speakers: Professor Victor Obajuluwa, Dr. Mukaila Kareem
- Invited Guests on the High Table
- Members and families of the Ife Physical Therapy Alumni Association
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Preamble

It is my honor and unique privilege to present this special eulogy in memory of Professor Nwuga, a colossus physiotherapist and an academic titan who answered the call of his creator on Wednesday, June 24, 2015. Professor Vincent Chukumeka (VC) Babatunde Nwuga was fondly called “Natural VC” (Vice-Chancellor) by his contemporaries (Professors Olusi, Makanjuola, Adeyemo, Soyinka and Odesanmi) at the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU). He was simply called “Prof” by many of his adoring fans and students. He made OAU campus and Ile-Ife Township his academic terrain, clinical laboratory and adopted home. News emanating from Nigeria indicated that he will be buried at Ife. That revealed how much he loves OAU.

I was at the airport enroute to attend this years' 7th annual Iife Physical Therapy Association convention when the sad news announcing his demise was conveyed on my iPod in an email message from Dr. Emmanuel John. As I was struggling to obtain the full details of the story, my iPod suddenly went blank, literally dead. It took me over 12 hours musing about the sad news in order to fully digest the impact of this consequential loss to his immediate family and the physiotherapy profession at large.

Physiotherapy Education

Professor Nwuga, a man with boisterous laughter and a non-reproducible “guyish” style gait was a self-made home breed physiotherapist turned international guru known for the management of patients with low back dysfunction. He received his early physiotherapy education from Great Britain where he earned a diploma and became a registered Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (MCSP). He subsequently obtained his baccalaureate and Master’s degrees in physical therapy from Canada and USA, respectively.

On returning to Nigeria in the early 70s after his Master’s degree, through hard work and determination, he systematically repackaged the oscillatory manual therapy techniques conceptualized by Chiropractors and Osteopaths and made them his own. A gentle mobilization therapeutic approach he termed *Nwugarian* technique which he successfully used in the treatment of low back dysfunction.

Beacon of Hope

Professor Nwuga was a “larger than life” man with an unassuming and “down to earth” personality. He was a beacon of hope to many of his students who saw him as a “fatherly figure” whom they can confide-in. He was also a beacon of hope to many of his patients with low back pain whom he laid his hands on to treat and relieved of many years of

agony and despondency. No doubt, Professor Nwuga will be sorely missed by his colleagues, mentees, students and patients.

Leadership

An iteration of the challenges faced by the physiotherapy profession in its early years will be instructive here to allow a better understanding of Professor Nwuga's impact on the profession of physiotherapy in Nigeria. The history of physiotherapy in Nigeria is well documented in the extant literature and it is not my intention to repeat it here. However, it is sanguine to state that the profession of physiotherapy was recognized by the federal government of Nigeria in the early 60s.¹ Unfortunately, the recognition was not backed up by legislative mandate that provides regulatory control by a recognized board. The lack of a legitimate regulatory board in charge of the practice of physiotherapy had negative impact on the stature, reputation and image of our profession within the medical establishment and the Nigerian society at large. As a two term President of the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy (NSP), during the late 70s and early 80s, Professor Nwuga brought style, stature and pizzazz to the image of the physiotherapy profession during his tenure. Professor Nwuga and the other NSP Presidents before and after him were instrumental in the federal government action that finally established the Medical Rehabilitation Therapy Board in 1988.

Impact on Physical Therapy Education

The University of Ibadan started a degree program in physiotherapy in October 1966; and in 1971 the University of Lagos commenced a three-year diploma program, which was upgraded to a four year Bachelor of Science degree in 1977. Professor Nwuga in 1977 initiated a four year Bachelor of Medical Rehabilitation (physiotherapy) program at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now OAU).² The curricula of the physiotherapy programs

at the University of Ibadan, and University of Lagos were patterned along the British system of education. On the other hand, OAU program developed by Professor Nwuga was modeled after the Canadian and American course system approach to physical therapy education. At their inception, the educational programs in Nigeria had limited resources and only few students were produced. Therefore, the majority of the physiotherapists in Nigeria in the '70s were practitioners with the MCSP credential, and a few physiotherapist aides trained at the School of Physiotherapy at Igbobi, Lagos.

One of the professional barriers that confronted new graduates in the 70s and early 80s was the poor condition of service and limited career mobility within the profession. For example, in 1975, physiotherapists were placed on Salary Grade 7; a grade lower than what university graduates with degrees in humanities, social and natural sciences were placed. The salary disparities and inequities arose because of the wrong perception by government bureaucrats about the rigor of what it takes to be a physiotherapist. The Udoji Salary Regulation Panel, created by the federal government in 1976, was unaware that physiotherapy education was offered at the bachelor's degree level at the University of Ibadan.

The multiple entry-level education (certificate, diploma and degree) in physiotherapy were a big source of confusion for federal and state governments, specialist hospitals and University Teaching Hospitals employers at the time. The consensus opinion held by the Udoji Salary Regulation Panel was that physiotherapy education was at diploma and certificate levels. It took skillful and concerted lobbying of the Udoji Salary Regulation Panel by the Executives of the *Association of Undergraduate Physiotherapy Students* at the University of Ibadan and the NSP under the capable leadership of Professor Nwuga and his team. In 1979, physiotherapy was re-graded and accorded the appropriate remuneration within the federal and state government salary structures.

Role Model for a Generation of Physiotherapist

I was a student at the University of Ibadan in the mist of the stated challenges faced by our profession. As an undergraduate student, with limited clinical experience under my belt, I had many unanswered and troubling questions on the inferiority complex and low self esteem that I observed amongst the upper echelon of our profession when they interact with medical consultants. My confidence about physiotherapy profession was further eroded by the limited career ladder mobility within our profession, and the lack of postgraduate educational opportunities in Nigeria and in the United Kingdom.

Many of my colleagues at Ibadan, in year two of our education, were at the verge of dropping out of physiotherapy profession in search of other promising and respectable careers. When we saw no hope for professional development and no prospect for advanced degrees in physiotherapy, Professor Nwuga suddenly emerged on the scene and brought us hope. Our misgivings and doubts about physiotherapy profession instantaneously changed for the better when Professor Nwuga came to deliver a lecture on “*The Future and Specialization in Physiotherapy*” at a conference organized by the *Association of the Undergraduate Physiotherapy Students* at the University of Ibadan in 1976.

Professor Nwuga was introduced at the beginning of the lecture as the first physiotherapist in Nigeria with a Master’s and doctoral degrees; and an expert in the management of low back pain. He spoke eloquently with passion and authority on several topical issues within the profession of physiotherapy, and he took time to answer the most mundane of all questions.

In addition, Professor Nwuga presented myriads of opportunities for clinical specialization and advanced (Master’s and doctoral) degrees from universities in the

United States of America and Canada. His wise counsel changed our negative perception about physiotherapy profession. He came across as an intelligent physiotherapist who will hold his own discussing with medical consultants. This experience was gratifying and a game changer for me, and I believe many of my colleagues. He became an instant celebrity and a role model for my generation of physiotherapists in Nigeria.

Professor Nwuga's stature and profound accomplishments influenced the decision, early in my career, to be a physical therapist educator. He, in 1979, served as a referee in support of my application for admission into the graduate program in physical therapy at the University of Pittsburgh. After my doctoral degree in 1985, the decision to take up employment at OAU instead of the other two universities in Nigeria with physical therapy educational programs was influenced, in part, by Professor Nwuga putting his reputation on the line in supporting my application for admission into graduate school.

Walking Encyclopedia

Professor Nwuga was a prolific writer and man ahead of his time. He broke down the shackles of mediocrity associated with academic physiotherapy in Nigeria. He was an author of two books on manual therapy and over two dozen articles published in reputable journals internationally.

Professor Nwuga was an encyclopedia on wheels. As an undergraduate student, I became an ardent fan and an avid reader of his journal publications and his book, *Manipulation of the Spine*, which I read over many times. From reading his body of work as an undergraduate student, I came across and proudly added several of Professor Nwuga's pungent vocabularies to my English language lexicon. Words such as: armamentarium, pecuniary cost, conundrum, enigma, despondency, scourge,

ubiquitous, salutary effect, anachronism, paucity, dearth, sequelae and Gordian knot were some of Professor Nwuga's common verbiage that remained with me till today.

Being # 1

Professor Nwuga was a trail blazer and a visionary physical therapist educator extraordinaire, a doyen clinician per excellence. Professor Nwuga broke the glass ceiling of achievement in several domains within the physiotherapy profession. He has to his credit of being the first person to attain the following monumental accomplishments during his illustrious career:

1. In 1977, Professor Nwuga was the pioneer Head of Department of Medical Rehabilitation at OAU.
2. In 1985, Professor Nwuga developed at OAU the first postgraduate (Master's degree) physiotherapy program in Africa.
3. The first and still the only occupational therapy educational program in Nigeria was conceived in 1977 by Professor Nwuga, and with tenacity of purpose and determination was implemented two decades later.
4. Professor Nwuga was the first Nigerian physiotherapist to earn a postgraduate degree. He earned his Master's degree in physical therapy from the University of Wisconsin.
5. Professor Nwuga was the first Nigerian physiotherapist to earn a doctorate degree. He was conferred with the doctor of philosophy (PhD) degree by the University of Ife in 1977 after submitting a dissertation documenting the intellectual sequela of severe kwashiorkor among Nigerian school age children.³ He was a protégée of the late Professor T. Adesanya Ige Grillo.
6. Professor Nwuga was the first physiotherapist to attain the status of a Senior Lecturer in a Nigerian University.

7. Professor Nwuga was the first Nigerian to be appointed consultant physiotherapist by a University Teaching hospital.
8. Professor Nwuga was the first Nigerian physiotherapist to attain full professorship. Some people say the first professor of physiotherapy in Africa.
9. Professor Nwuga was the first physiotherapist to deliver an inaugural lecture in a Nigerian University.
10. Professor Nwuga was first physiotherapist from Nigeria to publish an empirically based research in an international peer reviewed rehabilitation journal. He published his research in high impact citation journals such as the Archives of Physical Medicine, American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, the Scandinavian Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine and The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.
11. Professor Nwuga was the first physiotherapist from Nigeria to publish a book (Manipulation of the Spine, published in 1977) by a reputable international publishing house.
12. Professor Nwuga was appointed by the late Professor Grillo in 1979 to serve as vice dean of a Faculty of Health Sciences. A College with Medical and Dental Schools, Medical Rehabilitation, Environmental Health Science and Nursing programs. He was the first physiotherapist and non-physician to serve in the capacity of a vice-dean in a Nigerian University.
13. Professor Nwuga was the first physiotherapist and non-physician to be elected the Dean of the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences in the College of Health Sciences at OAU.
14. Professor Nwuga was the first Nigerian physiotherapist to be conferred Professor Emeritus by a Nigerian University.

Adieu

Despite all that he achieved academically, like all humans, Professor Nwuga was not a perfect man. When I joined the faculty at OAU, from 1986-1991, Professor Nwuga and I had our philosophical differences of opinion on a host of clinical and educational matters, but he remained a confidante and a mentor until he answered the call of the Almighty. I pray that the Lord grant his beautify family (my mentor, Gladys 'Peju Nwuga and children) and members of the physiotherapy communities in Nigeria and Diaspora the fortitude and strength to bear the departure of a physiotherapist icon. Professor Nwuga, Adieu, and May you rest in perfect peace in the bosom of your creator till we meet again.

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