A KEY NOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH, PROF. C. O. ONYEBUCHI CHUKWU, ON THE OCCASION OF CELEBRATION OF the 2\textsuperscript{nd} national oral health week/national oral health policy launch held at transcorp hilton hotel, abuja on tuesday 13\textsuperscript{th} november 2012.

PROTOCOL

It is with great pleasure and delight that I address this important gathering on the occasion of the formal launch of the National Oral Health Policy and the Compendium of Oral Health Researches in Nigeria as well as the Commemoration of the World Health Day/ Opening Ceremony of the National Oral Health Week.

A major highlight of the occasion is the inauguration of the distinguished Senate President, Senator David Mark GCON as the National Oral Health Champion.

Dentistry is the profession that is concerned with the health of the teeth, oral cavity and the associated structures including the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of these structures and the restoration of defective or missing part. Globally, the attention of Dentistry has been widened to emphasize oral health as an integral aspect of general health. Promotive dental care ensures a state of absence of disease and the optimal functioning of the mouth as well as its supporting structures and tissues in a way that preserves the self esteem.

We are recording an increase in some particularly preventable oral diseases such as noma, oral cancer, oro-facial trauma, periodontal disease and dental caries. This is worrisome and should be. Many of these problems are actually caused by some environmental factors and living conditions including poverty. Many systemic diseases, such as anaemia, leukaemia, diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis as well as HIV infection actually present with oral manifestations. The mouth is indeed the mirror of the body.

Hitherto, dental practice in Nigeria could be described as haphazard in terms of organization and management. This is not unrelated to many reasons such as:

1. Low oral health awareness
2. A huge need for oral health care among the populace relative to the number of practitioners

3. Misconceptions among Nigerians about oral health as not being life threatening and therefore not important

4. Absence of a coordinated system for collecting oral health data in the country

5. Mal distribution of available oral health facilities.

However, the Federal Ministry of Health is ardently pursuing the evolution of a national health system that guarantees the delivery of qualitative, effective, accessible and affordable health care services. To this end, the National Strategic Health Development Plan (NSHDP) was developed in collaboration with all the State Governments and other stakeholders in health. While the various health actors across the country have roles and responsibilities to perform in the NSHDP, a natural responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Health is LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE FOR HEALTH.

The document we are launching today is the first comprehensive National Oral Health Policy of international standard to be developed in Nigeria. The due process for the formulation of this policy document involved multi stake-holder participation and it was approved along with its robust implementation strategy by the Federal Executive council in October 2011, following its earlier approval by the National Council on Health in May of the same year.

The goal of the National Oral Health Policy is to achieve optimum oral health for Nigerians through sustainable awareness creation, strategic research, workforce development and coordination of oral health activities while institutionalizing modern dental practice and ensuring effective integration of oral health into relevant national health programmes.
In line with the NSHDP, the vision of the Federal Government to improve the oral health of all Nigerians is therefore encapsulated in the six priority areas of this policy, including:

1. Oral Health promotion
2. Training/human resource development
3. Service delivery, levels of care and standards
4. Oral health financing
5. Research/monitoring and evaluation
6. Information and Communication Technology/Oral Health Information System (OHIS)

Similarly, strategies have been identified and targets set for the effective implementation of the objectives.

In pursuance of Oral Health Promotion, the Senate President, His Excellency, Senator David Mark GCON has been designated the National Oral Health Champion of Nigeria. Sir, I salute your gracious acceptance to champion the promotion of oral health in Nigeria. I believe that your expected role will help to greatly raise the awareness of our teeming population about the importance of oral health.

The training and human development component of the policy is aimed at providing a sustainable supply of manpower for oral health. To rapidly address the gaps, the Ministry has embarked on training and retraining of the workforce. Notably, a trainer’s programme is underway. This training is designed to care and integration of oral health into general health. In view of the shortage of skilled manpower, Community Health Workers would be trained on the prevention, early detection and management of common oral diseases. The teaching of good ethical practices and jurisprudence in oral health care will also be a major component of the training curriculum.

The Federal Government has made budgetary provision for equipping its dental facilities in phases. A major lesson learnt by the Nigerian delegation to the just concluded World Dental Congress held in Hong Kong is the cost effectiveness of
Preventive Dental Care. Prevention is not just better than cure, it is cheaper. Dental treatment is generally expensive worldwide. That is why the evidence-based Hong Kong preventive dental care model is being studied and I believe when adopted in Nigeria it will reduce cost of dental treatment and increase access.

This year, we are particularly focusing on primary oral health care. We are procuring basic dental equipment and instruments for twelve (12) Federal Tertiary Hospitals and their outstations (Two Dental Clinics has been selected in each of the six geopolitical zones in the first instance. The target of the policy is to have at least 50% of all Primary Health Care (PHC) centres functional Dental Clinics by the year 2015. To this effect, I had sensitized the Governors of the 36 states during my presentation of the policy to them.

It is also in consonance with the component of the policy on the promotion of oral health research that the Inter-Country centre for Oral health (ICOH) in Africa, Jos is being renamed the Regional Centre for Oral Health Research and Training Initiatives.

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen the role of research in the development of any system cannot be overemphasized. The Intercountry Centre (ICOH) has therefore been mandated to develop strategic initiatives in research and training in order to locate us in a leading position in the global oral health community. Essentially, this will enable us to achieve the objectives of the World Health Organization (WHO) Oral Health Strategy for the African region.

The Federal Ministry of Health is actively participating in the ongoing development of a manual on oral health for African Region by the World Health Organization (WHO). The manual is focusing on common oral diseases and their effective management. In keeping with global trends on oral health therefore, the Ministry will make concerted efforts to domesticate this global policy.

In observance of the theme of this year’s National Oral Health Week “Transforming lives through sustainable oral health”, the Federal Government has developed a financing framework for oral health care financing through the
approved implementation strategy. This is expected to ensure sustainability and the performance measuring indicators have been identified. Specifically, a developmental provision of adequate oral health financing is the goal for all the tiers of Government by the year 2020. Similarly, at least 50% of all NHIS enrols should be able to access primary oral health care while oral health should have been integrated into the Community Based Social Health Insurance Scheme by 2015.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the number of unresolved causes of unnatural death is growing by the day while mass disasters are also on the attacks and even worse, families live in perpetual grief due to mass burials of their relatives who were victims of mass disasters.

With the incessant mass casualities in disasters, communal clashes, plane crashes, terrorist acts and criminality, it is imperative for Nigeria to expand the frontiers of investigation through standardized medical/dental records in line with international best practices. There is a need for strategic and proper medical/dental records, to be developed through collaboration of stakeholders for resource mapping and development, development of standard protocols/operational guidelines for medical/dental record system (universal system).

The content and scope of medical education is constantly widening because of the ever improving technology, innovations and emerging disease conditions and Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind. Therefore, the curriculum of Medical/Dental Schools as well as the Police College must be reviewed and updated to come abreast with the tremendous benefits of forensic medicine/dentistry to determine the cause of sudden, deaths, violent and unnatural deaths. We should then be applying scientific principles to provide answers to legal questions and resolve seeming riddles.

It was against this background that the Federal Ministry of Health presented a memorandum to the National Council on Health to note the urgent need for:
i. A strategic collaboration between the health sector, security agencies and judiciary in developing the criminal justice system and through the application of medical and scientific principles in answering the increasing legal questions pertaining to determination of causes of sudden, violent and unnatural deaths.

ii. Recognition and inclusion of dental records in medical check-ups as a veritable means of providing support to security and investigative Agencies of Government towards a healthy community.

Consequently, the National Council on Health has approved:

1. The review of the standards of medical check up in Nigeria and
2. Development of standard operational guidelines for medical check ups to include dental records and other relevant medical data.

I assure you, these shall be implemented assiduously.

Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the national oral health policy will lay the solid foundation upon which we shall build a formidable oral health system that provides efficient, effective, accessible and affordable oral health care for the Nigerian populace. We shall walk our talk. It will of course require the effective collaboration of all stakeholders involving both the public and private sectors. I therefore call on all stakeholders to seize this opportunity and pay attention on that small but important part that serves as both the gateway and mirror of the whole body. Together we shall go far in the right direction.

I thank you for your kind attention.