



Emanuel Olatunde Alaba Olanrewaju Odeku (1927–1974): First African Neurosurgeon Trained in the United States and Establisher of the National and West African Postgraduate Medical Colleges

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Key words

- African neurosurgery
- Global surgery
- Latunde Odeku
- Neurosurgery
- Nigeria

Abbreviations and Acronyms

MBHS: Methodist Boys' High School

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INTRODUCTION: EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Emanuel Olatunde Alaba Olanrewaju Odeku (**Figure 1** and **2**) was born on June 29, 1927 in Awe, located in the Oyo province of South Western Nigeria.^{1,2} Born to a Baptist deacon, Odeku had a decent Christian upbringing.¹ The Odeku family initially resided in Awe for his first 5 years before eventually returning to their original home in Lagos, Nigeria.² Latunde Odeku's poetic consciousness is strongly influenced by the 5 years he spent as a toddler in Awe's rural, traditional setting. Spending his formative years here strongly influenced his poetic sensibilities, evident in many of his poems.² In 1940, at the age of 13, he was admitted to the

■ **BACKGROUND:** In this comprehensive historical account, the authors delve into the remarkable trajectory of Dr. Latunde E. Odeku, a pioneering figure in neurosurgery.

■ **METHODS:** The inspiration for this project was ignited by the discovery of the original scientific and bibliographic materials of Latunde Odeku, a renowned Nigerian neurosurgeon and the first African neurosurgeon in history. Following a thorough review of the literature and information available on Dr. Odeku, we have compiled a comprehensive and detailed analysis of his life, work, and legacy.

■ **RESULTS:** This paper begins by introducing his childhood and early education in Nigeria, highlights his journey through medical school and residency in the United States, and follows his career and role in establishing the first neurosurgical unit in West Africa. We celebrate the life and legacy of Latunde Odeku, a trailblazing neurosurgeon whose contribution has inspired generations of medical professionals in Africa and around the world.

■ **CONCLUSIONS:** This article sheds light on the remarkable life and achievements of Dr. Odeku and his trailblazing work for generations of doctors and researchers.

prestigious Methodist Boys' High School after obtaining his primary education at St. John's School in Lagos.¹ While at Methodist Boys' High School, Odeku shortened his first name Olatunde to Latunde.² There, he achieved an impressive feat by passing the London matriculation examination with a higher score than several of his tutors who took the exam that same year.¹ He finished high school with the highest marks in biology, chemistry, English, geography, and history.^{1,3} Between 1946 and 1947, he served as a probation officer in the Nigerian Customs and Excise Department.²

Due to his outstanding academic performance, he was presented with many opportunities and decided to move to the United States in 1947 to pursue higher education.^{1,3} He was awarded the New York Phelps-Stokes Fund scholarship and matriculated to Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he obtained his

undergraduate degree.^{1,3} Majoring in zoology, he graduated in 1950 with a Bachelor of Science degree, summa cum laude, and as the valedictorian of his class.^{3,4} Carrying an ever-growing thirst for knowledge, he attended the Howard University College of Medicine after receiving a scholarship and obtained his M.D. degree in 1954, achieving his dream of becoming a physician.^{1,3} During his time at the Howard University, he exhibited exceptional academic prowess which earned him an invitation to join the Kappa Pi Honorary Medical Society, a distinction reserved for the top 10% of students. Additionally, he placed third in his medical school class upon graduating.^{1,3,4}

EARLY CAREER: RESIDENCY

On completion of medical school, he spent his internship year under the

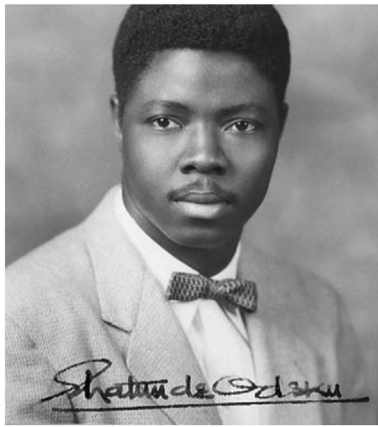


Figure 1. Signed photograph of E. Latunde Odeku.¹⁴

tutelage of the late Professor Carl V. Weller.¹ During his internship, he focused on pathology, deepening his knowledge in the field and honing his skills as a physician.¹ Following his intern year, in pursuit of expanding his understanding of tropical medicine, he spent the following year in Nigeria as a medical officer at the Lagos General Hospital.² This experience allowed him to see firsthand the challenges of providing medical care in a tropical environment. He would later describe this time as a transformative experience which shaped his career.^{1,3,4}

In 1956, Dr. Odeku returned to the United States to begin residency training in neurosurgery.¹ During this time, he made the decision to return to Nigeria following completion of his studies abroad.¹ This decision proved to be pivotal, as he would later spend a significant portion of his neurosurgical career in Nigeria, pioneering the field and making ground-breaking contributions to the medical sciences.¹ During his first year as a resident, he acted as an assistant resident in general surgery under the late Professor Frederick A. Collier.¹ The following year, he was given a chance to participate in a 3-year neurosurgery training program at the University of Michigan Medical Centre, Ann Arbor, with Professor Edgar A. Kahn and his associate Dr. Richard C. Schneider as his mentors.¹

On completing his residency in 1960, he spent the following year at Walter Reed

Medical Center in Washington D.C., training in neuropathology under Dr. Webb Haymaker, an opportunity offered to him by the Reim Foundation Grant at Ann Arbor.^{1,5} For the following 4 months, he studied pediatric neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia under the tutelage of Dr. Eugene N. Spitz, the inventor of the Spitz-Holter valve used to treat hydrocephalus.^{1,6} In the fall of 1961, Dr. Odeku returned to his alma mater and was appointed a lecturer in neuroanatomy and neurosurgery at the College of Medicine for the 1961–62 academic year.^{1,7} He was also a consultant neurosurgeon at the Freedmen's Hospital of the same institution.^{1,5} On November 16, 1961, he passed his board examinations "with flying colours" to become the second African-American certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery.^{3,5} During this time, he received multiple job offers in the United States, each promising a rewarding career in medicine. Ultimately, he made the decision to return to Nigeria.^{5,8} For him, returning was more than a job opportunity. He was passionate about using his knowledge and expertise to improve the health-care landscape in Nigeria and make a positive impact on people's lives and livelihoods.

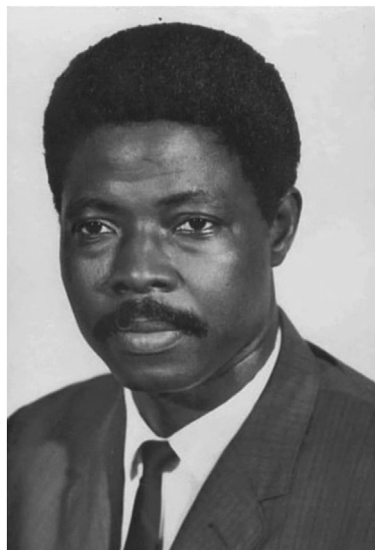


Figure 2. Photograph of E. Latunde Odeku.¹⁵

PERSONAL LIFE

Dr. Odeku's personal life was marked by 2 marriages, both to other medical doctors. His first marriage in 1957 was to Dr. Mary Gilda Marques (also Howard-trained). Their union was blessed with 2 children: one daughter and one son (Lenora and Peter). In 1962, the couple separated as Dr. Mary Gilda Marques did not believe going back to Nigeria maximized her utility. In 1971, Dr. Odeku married Katherine Jill Adcock, an English doctor who was employed at University College Hospital, where they met. This union also resulted in the birth of 2 children: another daughter and a son.²

Despite his busy schedule as a health-care professional, Dr. Odeku was also a highly accomplished and prolific poet. He authored 2 collections of poetry: *Twilight: Out of the Night* (1964) and *Whispers from the Night* (1969).² His work was known for its depth and emotion. Notably, in *Whispers from the Night*, he emphasizes his belief that everyone should have the opportunity to assert their right to self-determination and that embodying goodness is essential to defining one's existence in a hostile environment.⁹ Overall, his poetry is characterized by a philosophical approach of life as he explores various aspects of existence. When Dr. Odeku was not practicing medicine or writing, he enjoyed time with his family, traveling, reading, and engaging in intellectual discussions with peers. He was known to be charismatic, charming, and a joy to be around.

1962: YEAR OF RETURN

Dr. Odeku returned to Nigeria in September 1962, at a great monetary and personal cost, since his passion for bringing the best neurological care to the people of his home-country superseded every other consideration.⁴

Dr. Odeku was highly sought after by medical schools in both Ibadan and Lagos; he began working at the University of Ibadan as the first neurosurgeon of West Africa, bringing an array of costly neurosurgical instruments he had procured at a personal cost.^{1,3,4} Despite the numerous economic advantages of working as a neurosurgeon in the United States, his philosophy led him to embark on the



Figure 3. Latunde Odeku et al. Odeku situated in front row, fourth from the left.⁸

“practice of neurosurgery speciality, with clinical and basic research in its various aspects, as well as its teaching at one or more of the medical centers actively developing at home in Nigeria, West Africa.”¹ On October 23, 1962, he was referred his first patient, a 12-year-old boy with a brain tumor, by the chairman of the Department of Surgery.¹ The successful resection of the tumor, witnessed by the general surgery chairman, marked the beginning of the neurosurgical unit in Ibadan.¹ In 1963, he was promoted to the position of senior lecturer at Ibadan and was elected a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. Two years later, he was appointed a full professor of surgery at the age of 38.⁵ His unwavering commitment to patient care and meticulous surgical practice earned him a respected reputation as the *Father of Neurosurgery in Black Africa*.^{1,3}

CLINICAL HIGHLIGHTS

The Adelo-Odeku disease refers to a type of congenital dermoid or epidermoid inclusion cyst that develops over the anterior fontanelle and below the galea aponeurotica.¹⁰ This rare disease, primarily found in children, was initially reported in 1971 by Dr. Adelola Adelo-Odeku and Dr. Latunde Odeku in 18 Nigerian patients.¹¹

Congenital dermoid inclusion cysts account for 0.1%–0.5% of cranial tumors and 0.2% of inclusion cysts. Initially considered a disease of African children, there have been various reports of this affecting various ethnic populations across the globe.¹⁰ However, the Adelo-Odeku disease primarily affects the African population, most commonly with presenting age of 3–6 months.¹² Typical management of care includes computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, and surgical excision consideration.

Dr. Odeku was one of the first to reveal that brain tumors were less diagnosed in Africans when compared to Caucasians.¹³ He concluded that meningioma was the most common type, with glioblastoma multiforme and acoustic neuromas being less common.¹³ He also conducted research on traumatic lesions of the craniospinal axis, as well as missile-induced head injuries and their long-term effects on victims of the Nigerian Civil War.¹³ His ground-breaking studies in brain tumors and traumatic injuries have contributed to the global literature on the subject further cementing his legacy as one of the foremost neurosurgeons in Africa.

Academic Excellence

Throughout his illustrious career, Dr. Odeku was dedicated to improving medical

education and practice in Africa. He made notable contributions to neurosurgical literature, publishing 61 articles in peer-reviewed journals over 12 years (Table 1).⁵ To make West Africans aware of the emergence of the novel discipline of neurosurgery at Ibadan, he initially disseminated his earliest papers to local journals. Afterward, he produced a considerable amount of work and published it in various overseas journals.¹ He was on the editorial boards of the *Journal of the Nigerian Medical Association*, *African Journal of Medical Sciences*, *West African Medical Journal*, and the *International Surgery Journal*. He also belonged to many professional and academic bodies⁵ (Table 2). He shared his knowledge and expertise in neurosurgery with medical professionals across Africa and throughout the world, contributing to the enhancement of surgical skills and improving patient outcomes. Dr. Odeku was also renowned for his remarkable ability to diagnose conditions quickly. His selfless provision of neurosurgical care provided hope and inspiration to countless individuals.³ Notably so, Odeku established the National and West African Postgraduate Medical Colleges as well as the initiation processes at the University of Ibadan College of Medicine.^{1,5} In fact, one of his noteworthy contributions was

Table 1. Contributions of Dr. Odeku

Authors	Title	Year Published	Journal	Identifier
Odeku EL, Mainwaring AR	Unusual aneurysmal bone cyst: A case report.	1965	Journal of Neurosurgery	22:172–176
Odeku EL	Beginnings of neurosurgery at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria	1965	West African Med Journal	14:85–98
Odeku EL, Janota I	Dandy-Walker-Taggart “syndrome.”	1965	The West African Medical Journal	14:137–144
Odeku EL	The effects on muscle tonus and strength of lesions of the macaque corticospinal tracts at spinal cord levels	1965	University of Michigan Medical Center journal.	31:234–239
Kinnear TW, Janota I, Odeku EL	Multiple cerebrospinal axis neurilemmomas coexisting with meningiomas. (A case report)	1966	West African Med Journal	15:10–16
Odeku EL, Schneider RC	Cervical spondylosis with neurologic deficit	1966	Michigan Medicine	65:533–541
Dada TO, Odeku EL	Epilepsy in the Nigerian patient	1966	West African Med Journal	15:153–163
Odeku EL, Janota I	Intracranial masses—Ibadan	1967	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	16:31–42
Odeku EL, Grant IH, Ekop AC	Congenital malformations of the cerebrospinal axis seen in Western Nigeria. The spinal meningoceles	1967	International Journal of Surgery	47:580–596
Odeku EL	Congenital malformations of the cerebrospinal axis seen in western Nigeria. The African child with “encephalocele.”	1967	International Journal of Surgery	48:52–62
Odeku EL, Ransome-Kuti O, Elam HP	Aneurysm of the great vein of Galen complicated by chronic subdural abscess	1967	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	16:109–113
Odeku EL, Ikeme AC	Electrocardiographic changes in Nigerian Africans during fractional pneumoencephalography	1967	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	16:207–212
Braband H, Odeku EL, Janota I	Intracranial and spinal symptoms in Burkitt’s tumor [in German]	1968	Fortschr Geb Röntgenstr Nuklearmed	108:177–184
Odeku EL	Intracranial vascular anomalies in Nigerians	1968	Journal of the National Medical Association.	60:173–180
Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL, Luzzato L	Congenital pain asymbolia and auditory imperception	1968	Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry	31:291–296
Sinnette C, Odeku EL	Rubinstein-Taybi syndrome. The first case in an African child and the first case recognized at birth	1968	Clinical Pediatrics	7:488–492
Odeku EL, Lucas AO, Richard DR	Intramedullary spinal cord schistosomiasis: Case report	1968	Journal of Neurosurgery	29:418–423
Odeku EL, Osuntokun BO	The clinical neurology of Burkitt’s neoplasm. A preliminary evaluation based on 105 cases.	1968	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	17:263–267
Martinson FD, Odeku EL	The problem of unilateral proptosis in Nigeria	1969	International Journal of Surgery	51:20–29
				Continues

Table 1. Continued

Authors	Title	Year Published	Journal	Identifier
Adeloye A, Osuntokin BO, Odeku EL	Insanity and tumors	1969	British medical journal.	1:54–55
Odeku EL, Martinson FD, Akinosi JO	Craniofacial fibrous dysplasia in Nigerian Africans	1969	International Journal of Surgery	51:170–182
Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL	Psychotic behavior resulting from persistent pneumocephalus	1969	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	18:13–16
Odeku EL, Adcock KJ	Neonatal hydrocephalus due to intracerebellar hematoma	1969	International Journal of Surgery	51:302–307
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Metastatic neoplasms of the brain in Nigeria	1969	British journal of cancer.	23:340–348
Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL, Adeloye RB	Nonembolic ischemic cerebrovascular disease in Nigerians	1969	Journal of the neurological sciences.	9:361–388
Odeku EL, Adeloye A	Cerebral tuberculomas in Nigerian patients	1969	Tropical and geographical medicine.	21:293–304
Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL, Adeloye RB	Cerebrovascular accidents in Nigerians: A study of 348 patients	1969	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	18:160–173
Dada TO, Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL	Epidemiological aspects of epilepsy in Nigeria; A study of 639 patients	1969	Diseases of the nervous system.	30:807–813
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	The nervous system in sickle cell disease	1970	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	1:33–48
Adeloye A, Latunde Odeku EL	Missile head injury in Nigeria	1970	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	19:41–45
Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL	Epilepsy in Nigerians. Study of 522 patients	1970	Tropical and geographical medicine.	22:3–19
Adeloye A, Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL	Spontaneous subarachnoid haemorrhage in Nigerians	1970	Tropical and geographical medicine.	22:20–29
Adeloye A, Anomah Ngu V, Latunde Odeku EL	Traumatic aneurysm of the first portion of the right vertebral artery	1970	The British journal of surgery.	57:312–314
Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL	Epilepsy in Ibadan, Nigeria. A study of 522 cases	1970	The African journal of medical sciences.	1:185–200
Odeku EL, Adeloye A	A case of human pseudotail	1970	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	19:115–116
Adeloye A, Singh SP, Odeku EL	Stridor, myelomeningocele, and hydrocephalus in a child	1970	Archives of neurology.	23:271–273
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	The pattern of road traffic accidents seen at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria. A preliminary study	1970	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	19:153–157
Adeloye A, Ogbeide MI, Odeku EL	Massive intracranial hemorrhage in sickle cell anemia	1970	Neurology	20:1165–1170
Odeku EL, Adeloye A, Osuntokun BO	Nontuberculous intraspinal canal masses in Ibadan	1971	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	2:37–48
Odeku EL	Perspectives in neurosurgery	1971	Clinical Neurosurgery	18:41–61
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Epilepsy after missile wounds of the head	1971	Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry	34:98–103
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Congenital subgaleal cysts over the anterior fontanelle in Nigerians	1971	Archives of Disease in Childhood	46:95–98

Adeloye A, Odeku EL	A syndrome characteristic of tangential bullet wounds of the vertex of the skull	1971	Journal of Neurosurgery	34:155–158
Adeloye A, Familusi JB, Alabi GO, Latunde Odeku E	Stevens-Johnson syndrome following anticonvulsant therapy in penetrating head injury	1971	Ghana Medical Journal	10:56–59
Odeku EL, Richard DR	Peculiarities of spinal trauma in Nigeria	1971	The West African medical journal and Nigerian practitioner.	20:211–225
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	The radiology of missile head wounds	1971	Clinical Radiology	22:312–320
Adeloye A, Kolawole TM, Odeku EL	Myelography in the diagnosis and prognosis of brachial plexus injuries	1971	The West African medical journal and Nigerian practitioner.	20:280–284
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Congenital malformations of the central nervous system in Nigeria	1972	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	21:73–77
Adeloye A, Osuntokun BO, Hendrickse JP, Odeku EL	The neurology of metastatic chorion carcinoma of the uterus	1972	Journal of Neurological Sciences	16:315–329
Odeku EL, Osuntokun BO, Adeloye A, Williams AO	Tumors of the brain and its coverings. An African series	1972	International Journal of Surgery	57:798–801
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Carotid cerebral angiography at Ibadan, Nigeria	1973	The West African medical journal and Nigerian medical & dental practitioner.	22:7–14
Odeku EL, Osunkoya BO, Adeloye A, Williams AO	Neoplasms of the sella turcica region in Ibadan, Nigeria	1973	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	4:127–136
Osuntokun BO, Osuntokun O, Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Primary neuro-ophthalmological presentation of Burkitt's lymphoma	1973	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	4:111–117
Odeku EL, Adeloye A, Osuntokun BO	The neurological picture of Burkitt's lymphoma in Ibadan	1973	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	4:119–126
Odeku EL, Adeloye A, Osuntokun BO, Williams AO	Intracranial tumour pattern in Ibadan, Nigeria	1973	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	4:137–141
Odeku EL, Adeloye A	Cranial meningiomas in the Nigerian African	1973	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	4:275–287
Adeloye A, Odeku EL	Subgaleal hematoma in head injuries	1975	International Journal of Surgery	60:263–265
Odeku EL, Adeloye A, Williams AO, Osuntokun BO	Tumors within the spinal column	1976	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	5:23–25
Adeloye A, Osuntokun BO, Odeku EL, de V Hendrickse JP	The neurology of metastatic chorion carcinoma	1976	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	5:27–30
Odeku EL, Adeloye A	Gliomas of the brain among Nigerians	1976	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	5:31–33
Adeloye A, Odeku EL, Williams AO	Metastatic tumours of the brain and its enveloping structures in Ibadan, Nigeria	1976	African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences	5:181–184
Table Adapted from McClelland & Harris, ⁵ 2007.				

Table 2. Dr. Odeku's Honors and Achievements

Achievements	Year
Recipient, Matriculation Certificate, University of London.	1945
Probational Officer, Custom & Excise Department of Nigeria.	1946–47
BS in Zoology (Howard University)	1950
M.D. (Howard University)	1954
Member, Kappa Pi Honour Society, Howard University.	1954
Member, American Association of Neuropathologists.	
Member, The Harvey Cushing Society.	
Member, Congress of Neurological Surgeons of the USA.	
Member, New York Academy of Sciences.	
Member, Science Association of Nigeria.	
Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada, University of Western Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons (LMCC).	1955
Diplomate of the American Board of Neurological Surgery, DABS, Grace New Haven Hospital, Yale University.	1961
Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, FACS	1963
Fellow of Medical College of Surgeons, FMCS (Nigeria).	
Professor of Surgery	1965
Fellow of the International College of Surgeons, FICS.	1966
Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.	1968–1970
Head, Department of Surgery, University of Ibadan.	1969–1971
Member, Ford Foundation Team of West African Medical Educators.	1969
Recipient, Howard University Alumni Medal for Distinguished Service, Charter Day Exercises (in recognition of his outstanding postgraduate achievement in medicine and medical education in Nigeria and throughout the world).	1973
President, Nigerian Society of Neurological Sciences.	1970–1973
Member, Pan African Association of Neurological Sciences.	
Fellow, College of Surgeons of West Africa.	
American Association of Neuropathologists	
Fellow of the Nigerian Medical Council in Surgery	1971
W.H.O. exchange professor of neurosurgery at the Department of Surgery, Université Lovanium	

the institution of the swearing-in ceremony and commencement address at the University of Ibadan College of Medicine. These 2 customs are now observed in all Nigerian medical schools.¹

Tangibles and Intangibles

In March of 1973, Dr. Odeku was honored with Howard University's Alumni Medal for his dedicated work in medicine in Nigeria and around the globe. In June of that same year, after returning to Nigeria, he fell ill and had to be admitted to the University College Hospital. Dr. Odeku was subsequently

diagnosed with diabetes mellitus, a disease his parents had also suffered from. As a result of this condition, he was incapacitated for much of 1974 and had difficulties fulfilling his surgical duties with his usual proficiency. Soon after, he traveled to England in search of further treatment. Tragically, he succumbed to his illness and passed away at the Hammersmith Hospital on the 20th of August, 1974. His remains were buried on August 27, 1974, at the graveyard of St. Peter's Church, Burnham, Buckinghamshire. He was only 47 years old at the time of his passing.²

While his life was cut short, his legacy lives on, as his pioneering work in neurosurgery still serves as inspiration to many today. He left behind many of his ideas unfulfilled.^{1,3,4} His remarkable modesty and kindness throughout his life earned him numerous friends and admirers, making his loss even more difficult to bear.³ Dr. Kahn noted:

It is difficult in this country to assess the loss of such a man to a developing country like Nigeria.⁴

Dr. Nelson Oyesiku was among many physicians in Nigeria motivated to pursue neurosurgery as a career due to the example set by Dr. Odeku.⁵ As a graduate of the University of Ibadan College of Medicine just 5 years after the passing of Dr. Odeku, Dr. Oyesiku went on to complete neurosurgery training at Emory University.⁵ In October 2004, he became the first African-American president of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons.⁵ As a fitting tribute to his creativity and dedication, there is perhaps no better epitaph than the one he wrote in *Twilight* on November 1962 in Ibadan, Nigeria.²

On the last page

Not his noble birth, Or his illustrious sires; Neither his trophies nor his fame:

Not his dynasty, not his might, Not his knowledge, or his wits

But his simple way

All what he has been to his fellowmen

His highest note, perhaps unnoticed, His glory, unpretentious; His purest testimony. . .

That "he was a good man."²

Legacy

Dr. Odeku was a revolutionary neurosurgeon whose impact on the development of neurosurgery in Africa cannot be overstated (Figure 3). His pioneering work laid

the foundation for the growth and development of neurosurgery in Black Africa. His establishment of the first neurosurgical department in sub-Saharan Africa at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, was a pivotal moment in the history of medicine on the continent. His dedication to excellence, commitment to service, and passion for improving the lives of others continue to inspire new generations of medical professionals in Africa. Dr. Odeku could be described as a meteor that blazed through the Nigerian sky in a bright haze of light before disappearing into the oblivion of time forever.²

Dr. Benjamin Carson once wrote of Odeku:

I remember seeing a portrait of Dr. Odeku hanging on the wall in the neurosurgery department at the University of Michigan when I was a medical student there. It was clear that he had been greatly admired. He had died just the year before I did my first neurosurgery rotation as a third-year student. Perhaps even greater than his surgical and intellectual talents was his humanity. He bypassed a comfortable living in the United States to bring state-of-the-art medicine and enormous self-esteem to countless people in Nigeria and throughout the African continent. I think we can all

be very proud to have such a man as a member of our profession⁵

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