

# Factors Influencing Choice of Specialty amongst Nigerian Ophthalmologists

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**Purpose:** To determine the factors that influenced the choice of specialty amongst Nigerian Ophthalmologists.

**Material and Methods:** This study was conducted during the annual congress and scientific conference of the Ophthalmological society of Nigeria which took place at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria between 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2008. The respondents were interviewed with the aid of structured questionnaire by the author and three assistants. The data obtained with the study instrument (questionnaire) included the time the respondents opted for Ophthalmology and the factors that influenced their choice. The data obtained was analyzed with SPSS 12.0.1 statistical software.

**Results:** There were eighty respondents comprising of 33 (41.25%) Consultants, 2 (2.5%) Diplomats and 45 (56.25%) resident doctors. About a third of the respondents, 26 (32.5%) opted for Ophthalmology after their one year youth service. The factors that influenced their choice of specialty were mainly interest in the specialty, 68 (85%), opportunity to combine medicine and surgery, 27 (33.8%) as well as life style, 34 (42.5%).

**Conclusion:** Interest in the specialty was the leading factor that influenced choice of Ophthalmology.

Career is an individual's course or progress through life. It is considered to pertain to remunerative work (and sometimes formal education). A career is traditionally seen as a course of successive situation that make up a person's work life.

Medical profession is one of the most highly rated professions in Nigeria. The profession is regarded as a noble profession, thus medical doctors tend to command a lot of respect in the society. The desire to help people and the intellectual challenge of the profession have been reported to be important motivating factors underlying the wish to study medicine<sup>1-3</sup>. Medical training in Nigeria lasts a period of six years and an additional one year for internship. There is an increasing trend towards specialization in Nigeria as more doctors now enroll in the residency programme due to the relative improvement in the working condition in the Teaching hospitals in recent time.

Ophthalmology is a unique field that combines intellectual aspect of diagnosis and the opportunity to perform surgical procedures<sup>4</sup>. The practice of Ophthalmology is one of the most satisfying in medical profession due mainly to the broad scope of ophthalmic practice. Training in the field of Ophthalmology in Nigeria is coordinated by West African Post Graduate Medical College and National Post Graduate Medical College. The training lasts a period of five to six years. A number of Teaching Hospitals have either provisional or full accreditation to train Ophthalmologists. The specialty of Ophthalmology has undergone significant changes due to series of technological and therapeutic advances<sup>5</sup>. Medical practitioners have a range of choices to make among the different specialties. A number of factors tend to influence the choice of area of specialization. Role model influence, internship and elective experiences affect the choice of specialty<sup>6-8</sup>. Studies

have also shown that financial reward influence the choice of specialty<sup>9-11</sup>. The personal circumstances of the individual and the gender also play a role in specialty choice<sup>12</sup>. It has also been reported that academic and clinical factors play an important role in career choice among medical doctors<sup>13</sup>. The career choices and views of medical doctors about their jobs and training provide insight which can assist in workforce planning<sup>14</sup>.

In view of the increase in the number of medical doctors opting for Ophthalmology as a career, this study was designed to determine the factors that influenced specialty choice amongst Nigerian Ophthalmologists. It is hoped that the findings of this study will guide policy formulators in attracting more Nigerian doctors to the field of Ophthalmology. The author is not aware of similar studies among Ophthalmologists in Nigeria in recent time.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was conducted during the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria's annual congress, between 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2008. Ile-Ife is a Yoruba community located in South-West Nigeria. A total number of eighty Ophthalmologists and Resident Doctors were selected by simple random sampling out of the two hundred and eight that attended the conference. The respondents were interviewed with the aid of structured questionnaire by the author and three research assistants. Informed consent was obtained from each of the respondents. The information obtained with the study instrument (questionnaire) included their bio-data, the time the respondents chose Ophthalmology and the factors that influenced the choice of Ophthalmology as a career. The data obtained with the study instrument (questionnaire) was analyzed with SPSS 12.0.1 statistical soft ware package. Relevant policy implications were drawn from the ensuing findings.

## RESULTS

Eighty respondents participated in this study. The ages of the respondents ranged between 26 years and 58 years, with a mean age of 37.5 years and median age of 36 years. The respondents comprised of 51 males (63.75%) and 29 females (36.25%). Most respondents were married, 65 (81.25%) and the remaining 15 (18.75%) were single. Majority of the respondents were Christians, 60 (75%) and the rest

were Muslims, 20 (25%). Ethnicity of the respondents revealed that most of them were Yorubas, 50 (62.5%), 17 (21.25%) were Ibos, 3 (3.75%) were Hausas and the remaining 10 (12.5%) belonged to the other ethnic groups. Professional status of respondents: 33 (41.25%) were Consultant Ophthalmologists, 2 (2.5%) were Diplomats while 45 (56.25%) were residents doctors. The time the respondents decided on the choice of Ophthalmology as a specialty is detailed in table 1. It shows that about a third of the respondents 26 (32.5%) took the decision after their youth service.

The factors that influenced the choice of Ophthalmology are shown in table 2. It reveals that interest in the specialty was the commonest factor, 68(85%). The other factors included opportunity to combine medicine and surgery, 35 (43.8%) as well as lifestyle, 34 (42.5%).

## DISCUSSION

The age range of the respondents is in tandem with an active workforce that they belong to and this will come in handy in the quest for actualization of Vision 2020. The involvement of Consultant Ophthalmologists and Resident Doctors in this study will help in reducing cadre related bias to the barest minimum. It is interesting to note that most of the respondents opted for Ophthalmology after their qualification as medical practitioners. This finding is however expected as one is likely to make an informed decision about specialty choice after the person must have passed through all the areas of specialization. This finding is however at variance with that of Odusanya et al in Lagos, Nigeria in which 82.9% of the house officers interviewed had taken a decision on their area of specialization.<sup>15</sup> The finding of this study also differs from that of Noble in Canada in which about 55% of the study population stated that they made the decision to pursue their career in Ophthalmology during their training in the medical school<sup>16</sup>.

Medical doctors in Nigeria are usually exposed to two to four weeks posting in Ophthalmology during their medical training. However not all the training centers for house officers, mandate doctors to rotate through Ophthalmology during their training. In order to actualize the efforts at encouraging more doctors to become Ophthalmologists there is need for all training centers to introduce compulsory rotation in Ophthalmology for a period of two weeks for house officers during their training. This measure will also

expose the young doctors to more intense training in the field of Ophthalmology and this will empower them to provide qualitative primary eye care to a reasonable extent in their practice. Such group of doctors will also be an asset in actualization of Vision 2020.

**Table 1:** Time respondents opted for career in ophthalmology

Time	Frequency n (%)
Pre-medical training	2 (2.5)
During medical training	22 (27.5)
Internship	14 (17.5)
Youth Service	16 (20)
Post Youth Service	26 (32.5)
Total	80 (100)

**Table 2:** Factors that influenced choice of ophthalmology

Factor	Frequency n (%)
Interest	68 (85)
Opportunity combine medicine and surgery	35 (43.8)
Life style	34 (42.5)
Domestic circumstances	27 (33.8)
Prospect of promotion	23 (28.8)
Self appraisal of own abilities	23 (28.8)
Employment opportunity	22 (27.5)
Role model	22 (27.5)
Private practice opportunity	19 (23.8)
Structure of training	14 (17.5)
Family influence	12 (15)
Prestige	11 (13.8)
Rotation in ophthalmology	10 (12.5)
Financial reward	10 (12.5)

Interest in the specialty was the leading factor that influenced the respondents' decision to study Ophthalmology in this study. This is an important factor, as it will sustain their desire to keep up the practice. This finding is consistent with that of two other Nigerian studies by Odusanya et al<sup>15</sup> and Bojuwoye et al<sup>17</sup> though not amongst Ophthalmologists in which interest in specialty was the leading factor that influenced the career choice of their respondents. The finding of this study is also in keeping with that of studies done in Pakistan<sup>18</sup> and Taiwan<sup>19</sup> in which personal interest was the most important factor influencing choice of specialty. However a similar study done in Canada by Noble revealed that intellectual stimulation was the most cited factor that influenced specialty choice among Ophthalmologists (81%)<sup>16</sup>.

Another Canadian study by Noble et al among Ophthalmology residents revealed that having the opportunity to combine Medicine and Surgery was the most important factor that influenced the decision to pursue Ophthalmology (98%)<sup>5</sup>. This factor was however cited by 43.8% of the respondents of this study. It is understandable that life style consideration played a significant role in opting to pursue career in Ophthalmology as the specialty is less physically demanding than the core clinical specialties like General Surgery.

The relatively few females among the respondents may contribute to domestic responsibilities not been a leading factor that influenced the choice of Ophthalmology.

## CONCLUSION

The factors that influenced the choice of Ophthalmology amongst the respondents were mainly interest in the specialty, opportunity to combine Medicine and Surgery as well as lifestyle consideration. Most respondents opted to pursue their career in Ophthalmology after their qualification as medical doctors.

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