



In Memoriam: Dr. Enyi Okereke, MD, PharmD

Tribute on behalf of the Orthopaedic Residents and
Faculty at the University of Pennsylvania.



Dr. Okereke has been an integral part of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania for over two decades since 1987, both as a resident and as an attending. This year he would have completed his 15th year in the health system as a member of the faculty. Over 100 orthopaedic residents have had the privilege to train with Dr. Okereke and now will take the opportunity to carry out his legacy in several forms. It is extremely difficult to accurately depict what Dr. Okereke has meant to the residents over the last 20 years, but I will try our best to articulate what this amazing man has represented to us.

Dr. Okereke was commonly referred to as the International Man of Mystery by his residents. It was not uncommon to see him at the hospital Monday morning and in the midst of small talk regarding the past weekend, you'd quickly realize that he has just returned from a 4 day trip that took him through Italy, Tunisia and Brazil while making it back in time for his 7:30 am case ... and of course, he would have 8 cases scheduled for that day. And at the end of the day, it was customary to collect

medical/orthopaedic devices and equipment that would normally be discarded so they could be sterilized and used for his next medical mission.

Residents were often disappointed to hear that Dr. Okereke was going to be away for a few weeks during their rotation – this was standard practice. His absence was undoubtedly due to his passion for helping the underprivileged and making a difference in the arena of global health (specifically for the nation of Nigeria). However, it was difficult to avoid channeling this disappointment into inspiration when attaining a full understanding of what was important to him.

Dr. Okereke possessed such an incredible energy and love for life – it was evident with each and every smile. He always exuded a natural vigor, never paralleled by another. It was impossible to avoid being inspired by his words, and more importantly by his actions. His selfless acts for his family, his patients, and for us, his residents, continued to leave everyone that came in contact with him in a state of amazement. He worked extremely hard at providing excellent care for his patients, and he expected the same from his residents. His generosity was abundant and he always led by example.

His ability to be a mentor was second to none – there was always so much to learn from him, both inside and outside of the operating room. His ability to achieve life balance was without a doubt his most important lesson to teach. His words of wisdom will always echo in our minds and in our hearts.

“No matter how successful you are in any industry, the hardest thing that you will ever work toward is achieving life balance. Never lose perspective – that is the key to attaining happiness.”

Dr. Okereke will be sorely missed but his teachings will forge ahead through us, his residents. We thank him for his tutelage, and we will do our best to perpetuate the values and skills he has bestowed upon us. If we have the good

fortune of being able to touch the lives of 1/1000th the number of people as Dr. Okereke has with such sterling character and grace, we have lived our

Dr. Okereke was a beloved and respected member of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. Fifteen years ago, Dr. Okereke joined the faculty as the first orthopaedic surgery faculty member of African or African American descent.

Dr. Okereke excelled clinically, academically and obviously as an educator as articulated so well by Dr. Neil Sheth, one of the many Orthopaedic Surgery residents whose life Dr. Okereke touched. Dr. Okereke insisted on personally reviewing resident applications in order to insure that well qualified applicants of underrepresented groups were given an opportunity to participate in the interview process. Dr. Okereke was effective with a combination of humility and persistence in helping the leadership at Penn understand the importance of increasing diversity of the Orthopaedic Surgery faculty and residents at Penn. Prior to Dr. Okereke's residency, Penn had only had four residents of African American descent in its 100 year history and never more than 1 at any given time. Currently, Penn has three residents and two faculty members of African or African American descent.

Dr. Okereke served as Chief of the Foot and Ankle Service at the University of Pennsylvania. He was recognized for the outstanding clinical care he delivered to his patients locally, regionally and nationally. He was named a "Top Doc" in America and a "Top Doc" by "Philadelphia Magazine" on more than one occasion. He was a humanitarian and a leader in global health care as a member of ANPA (the American Nigerians Physicians Association) giving generously of his time and talents to improve health care in his native Nigeria. He was a leader academically with many peer review publications, book chapters and presentations at National and International Orthopaedic and Foot and Ankle Conferences. His academic accomplishments lead to his promotion to Associate Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery. He was a leader locally as a Board Member of the Philadelphia Orthopaedic Society holding several positions including Program Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. He was a leader nationally, serving on

lives right. We wish his family well, and they will always be in our thoughts.

-- Neil Sheth, MD

the Board of Directors of the J. Robert Gladden Orthopaedic Society, the premier National Multicultural Orthopaedic Society which focused on increasing diversity, cultural competence and addressing musculoskeletal health disparities for underserved patients.

With all of Dr. Okereke's humanitarian efforts, professional activities and accomplishments, it is difficult to imagine how he found time to excel in the area in which he treasured most, his family life. Dr. Okereke was an example for both younger faculty and residents on successfully balancing the challenges of academic medicine with a fulfilling family life. Having had the fortune of spending time with Dr. Okereke and his family, it was clear that his family was most important to him. He was always a loving, genuine and generous father, husband, uncle, brother and friend. He set such a high standard as a friend and family man that my wife and I could think of no one better to be "Godfather" of our daughter.

Dr. Okereke was always a man of principle. He was never afraid to support what he felt was right whether it was the popular point of view or not. He had an innate ability to understand when it was appropriate to confront issues with humility and diplomacy or when to take issues on directly, forcefully yet respectfully. In addition, his efforts were well directed. He understood the "big picture", where his efforts would have the greatest impact. At the time of his death, he was in Nigeria, attempting to study and obtain funding to improve the infrastructure in Nigeria to provide 21st century care to Nigerian's injured during motor vehicle accidents, one of the leading causes of preventable morbidity and mortality in Nigeria.

He was genuinely grateful and respectful of older individuals and past generations who worked so hard to fight for the freedoms we enjoy today. While Dr. Okereke will be missed greatly by all of us, we will be forever grateful for his generosity, his wisdom, and most importantly his devotion to his family and friends.

May God bless Dr. Enyi Okereke, Morium Okereke, Kalaya, Kelechi, Karim and the entire Okereke family.

-Charles Nelson, MD