

## MY COUNSELLING JOURNEY

By Helen Ochuko Kwanashie

I am Cnsl Helen Ochuko Kwanashie living and working in Nigeria. Although I am primarily, a Professor of Pharmacology, I became a Guidance-Counsellor as my *choice* second career and profession, within a historical context as explained below.

Throughout my over four decades work experience as a University Lecturer in Pharmacology (from 1982 to date), Education has been one of my professional thrusts as evidenced partly by my Pharmacology Education-focused publications starting from the late 1980s. From 1987 to 2021, I provided guidance within my formally-assigned Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences role as Academic Adviser, first to undergraduate students and later to postgraduate students as well, at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, Nigeria. In 2000, as President of the ABU Chapter of National Association of Women Academics, I spearheaded a successful university-wide resuscitation of the beleaguered Lecturer Adviser-Student Advisee (academic advising) scheme across the University. I have over the years, mentored hundreds and trained several on developing/implementing their personal strategic plans. I had also served as volunteer, offering diverse support to two organizations, namely: Hope for the Blind (1990-1997 and 2018-2021 in Zaria, Nigeria) and Home-Start UK (1993-1994 in Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom (UK)). These lived experiences and others not mentioned here for lack of space, made me appreciate the crucial role of counselling in all spheres of human development and fuelled my desire to become a professional counsellor starting from undertaking an introductory counselling course at Middlesex University London Summer School (UK) in 2016.

Thereafter, I earned a Higher Diploma in Guidance & Counselling Education (HGC) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) with focus on Guidance & Counselling, both from ABU, studying from 2018 to 2021. Currently enrolled in a Master degree programme in Guidance & Counselling with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Abuja, and as an academic in that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) university since 2021 to date, I am particularly keen on Online-enabled Counselling processes. I am constantly taking continuing education (CE) courses especially those centred on Self-care and Mental Health and in the process of transiting from a Pharmacology career (to be finalised upon retirement in May 2025) to a full-fledged Counselling career (after retirement). I am an active member of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), American Counseling Association (ACA) and the International Association of Psychology and Counseling (IAPC). I have participated actively in CASSON's conferences from 2019 to date, and in both the 2019 and 2024 editions of ACA's Annual Conference and Expo, held in New Orleans, LA, USA.

Routinely, I engage in Educational Guidance & Counselling, Academic Advising and Relationship Counselling (especially in marriage and family scenarios). Armed with some suicide-centred CEs as well as some practical counselling outcomes with persons experiencing depression, substance abuse, etc, I, as an invited speaker in the February 2024 Mental Health Seminar organised by the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Chapter of CASSON, addressed the subject of *Counselling for Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention in Nigeria*. I also contributed a presentation titled "*My Academic Life is Screaming for Help!*": A Wake-up Call by a Nigerian Undergraduate for Enhanced Academic Advising in the Country's Higher Education Institutions to the 2024 World Conference of IAPC which held from 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at New Orleans, LA, USA. The paper was the output from my PGDE project conducted 100% virtually, during the 2020 COVID-19 Lockdown.

I, Cnsl Helen Ochuko Kwanashie, excelled in my practice of Pharmacology and attained high laurels locally, nationally and internationally including but not limited to the following: University Teacher and Researcher, Past President and Fellow of the West African Society for Pharmacology (WASP), Executive Committee (Exco) Member of Pharmacology for Africa (PharfA), Pharmacology Educator Awardee of American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET), Fellow of the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) and Councilor on the 2018-2022 Exco of the International Union of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology (IUPHAR) and Secretary of its Education Section (IUPHAR-Ed). I am also a Fellow of the Institute of Educational Leadership Practitioners of Nigeria (IELPN). With similar enthusiasm and commitment, I am looking forward to fulfilling hopefully, ten years of full-fledge active practice as a Guidance-Counsellor, mainly within my private counselling practice, named: *All-round Counselling Solutions (ARCS)* headquartered at Life Camp in Abuja, Nigeria.