

PENSION >>

# High healthcare cost rattles retirees

By Francis Arinze Iloani

The high cost of healthcare is among the top worries of retirees and a major drain on their meagre monthly pension largely due to their exclusion from the National Healthcare Insurance Scheme (NHIS).

At retirement, civil servants and workers in the private sector are delisted from the NHIS and left to cater for their healthcare with their pension at the time that advancement in age would mean increased healthcare challenges.

Recently, a Deputy Director, who retired from a federal government agency in 2009, Yakubu Balarabe, tried to inquire from the National Pensions Commission (PenCom) if he could withdraw N2 million from his "substantial savings" in his retirement savings account (RSA) to treat his orthopaedic-related health challenge.

Unfortunately, there was no how he could do that since he had already taken a lump sum from his RSA at retirement.

Having notified he could not take money from his retirement savings to meet his health-related need, Balarabe reacted, "My savings is supposed to serve me and not my next of kin."

He wondered why he should lower his "status by begging friends to contribute money to treat" his ailment whereas he had money in his RSA.

Balarabe is not alone on this challenge as the Daily Trust recently reported the story of a retired civil servant, Mrs. Habiba Salisu, who spent most of her monthly pension on drugs.

Salisu, who is also a member of the Nigeria Union of Pensioners (NUP), expressed disappointment that there was no social security covers for the healthcare of senior citizens in the country.

"Pensioners are really suffering. In terms of health, we have nothing. You go to the hospital and you have to pay for everything from your pocket. You know, when you are aging, your health deteriorates faster. The drugs are so expensive that you cannot even use your monthly pension to purchase them. There are some of us who live on drugs, we spend a lot of money," she said.

It is hearth-warming to know that the federal government is not unaware of the plight of pensioners as a result of their exclusion from the NHIS.

Recently, the Executive Secretary of the Pension Transitional Arrangement Directorate, Barrister Sharon Ikeazor, expressed worry that pensioners are removed from the NHIS at the point they need the health insurance scheme the most.

Barrister Ikeazor is right going by Daily Trust's finding that there is a nexus between retirement and increased healthcare challenges.

A Swiss researcher, Stefanie Behncke, found that retirement "raises the risk of developing a cardiovascular disease and being diagnosed with cancer. Estimates also indicate that retirement has quite diverse effects for different individuals."

Retirement has also been linked with many health challenges such as Parkinson's disease, diabetes and osteoarthritis partly due to old age.

The PTAD's head hinted that her Directorate was drawing up a contributory social health insurance scheme for retirees under the Defined Benefits Scheme (DBS).

The Daily Trust obtained more details on the

proposed scheme from the Directorate and discovered that it would allow pensioners to make stratified contributions commensurate with their earnings into a single fund pool that is then used to guarantee them access to defined health services, including drug refills for chronic diseases, eye care services, and focused geriatric services.

The scheme, whose details are still sketchy, provides that health services to the pensioners within the scheme would be domiciled at primary and secondary health centres in the locality of the pensioners as this would further strengthen the ability of pensioners to access the services without the added constraint of high transportation costs to access services from centres in the major cities.

"The design of the programme will also task the service delivery centres with verification of life of pensioners within the political ward or local government areas every quarter, as a condition for maintaining listing as a service delivery centre on the programme," PTAD stated.

In essence, this health insurance programme will allow the pensioners gain more mileage from their meagre pensions, through a pooled health financing mechanism, while improving ease of verification of life for PTAD.

To achieve the plan, PTAD plans to roll out a discount card for pensioners linked to a central database that facilitates record keeping and easy identification by health service providers.

As laudable as this initiative is, there is still a long way to go because pensioners like Balarabe, who are on the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS), will not benefit from it as it is only for pensioners on DBS.

Retirement quote

Don't simply retire from something; have something to retire to - Harry Emerson Fosdick

Health tips for retirees

**Regulate your diet:** Some certain classes of food are expected to be avoided upon retirement.

**Reduce or stop smoking if possible:** Smoking is one of the deadly acts that send people to their early graves especially those that have come of age.

**Adequate sleep:** Taking a nap is important for the body.

**Regular walk:** Retirees must not carry out strenuous exercise to keep fit.

## Premium Pensions appoints Tijjani executive director

By Francis Arinze Iloani

The Board of Premium Pensions Limited has appointed Mr. Kabir Ahmed Tijjani as an Executive Director and Mr. Lamido Yuguda as Non-Executive Director.

A statement from the Company's Corporate Communications, signed by Aliyu Mohammed Ali, indicated that the new appointments were made out of "a strategic performance-driven reward system aimed at achieving immense potentials within the pension industry."

Mr. Tijjani, a seasoned corporate legal practitioner, joined Premium Pension Limited since its inception in 2005 as a management staff and rose to become the company's Chief Marketing Officer (CMO).

Mr. Yuguda, a Fellow of Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), brought to the Board of Premium Pension Limited more than three decades of experience as a central banker, economist and investment manager.

The statement indicated that the new appointments were expected to enhance robust business development by the Company.

## NPF Pensions budgets N400m yearly for retirement support welfare

The NPF Pensions Limited sets aside N400 million annually for retirement support welfare scheme, which is meant to cushion financial problems that might be encountered by retired police personnel awaiting their gratuity.

Speaking during a pre-retirement seminar held in Abuja yesterday, the Managing Director of the firm, Hamza Sale Wuro Bokki, lectured participants on how to use their retirement benefits to establish profitable businesses.

Bokki used the opportunity of the seminar held simultaneously in all the zones across the country to advise the retirees to engage in businesses that will make them live comfortable lives in future.

## Pension complaints and solutions

**Question:** Is it true that on attainment of 70 years of age, a retiree's monthly benefits lapses? I learnt that any retiree who may still be alive over 70 years will lose any accrued savings in his RSA? Kindly clear the Air for us. - Bala

**Answer:** A retiree's monthly pension does not elapse upon attaining 70 years of age. Under programmed withdrawal, the pensioner is entitled to pension as long as there is still balance left in his retirement savings account irrespective of age. - PenCom

**Question:** I have two RSA PIN numbers, PEN 100315040945 with Leadway pensure and PEN 100435605718 with Stanbic IBTC. I then applied to Pencom for transfer of my contributions to Leadway which was

approved and conveyed to PFAs and myself since May 2017. I have been urging Stanbic to effect the transfer but not yet done. Can you please, assist and facilitate the transfer of all my contributions to Leadway? Or direct me on what to do to archive same. - Mulima

**Answer:** Kindly send a complaint letter to the Director General of the National Pension Commission (PenCom) indicating that the transfer approved had not been effected. Kindly attach all relevant documents.

**Question:** Why are retirees of the new pension scheme not being paid in good time? For instance, the 2017 retirees of the federal government are still waiting with no sign of when they will get their benefits. - Moriki, Zamfara

**Answer:** This is due to delayed release of accrued rights by the federal government. - PenCom

**An appeal:** I am a contract teaching staff in kano. We are more than 250 contract staff. Our gratuity is due for the past four year d government refuse to pay us. Most of us are 14 years in service without any benefit. We are appealing to the Kano State governor to kindly pay our gratuity. - Kayode, Kano

**Answer:** We hope someone in Kano state government will take note of this appeal. - Daily Trust

Send your pension and retirement complaints as SMS to 08084137460