

“It feels almost magical” – A female hydrocele surgeon shares her story

We celebrated a major milestone recently, as Dr Adaora Lynda Nwodo became the first female surgeon to receive training in hydrocele operations through Nigeria’s neglected tropical diseases programme.

Hydrocele is a complication of the disease lymphatic filariasis, in which a patient’s scrotum becomes severely swollen. Hydrocele surgery is typically a male-dominated pursuit, but Dr Nwodo is not letting that hold her back.



She explains: “There’s something deeply fulfilling about taking a patient with a major problem like a large hydrocele through surgery and seeing them recover well. It feels almost magical.”

Dr Nwodo received training in the latest surgical techniques during a recent session facilitated by Sightsavers and the Nigerian health ministry, through the Reaching the Last Mile Fund. We salute her courage, determination, and passion and hope she inspires a new generation of female surgeons.

You can read Dr Nwodo’s full interview below.

What inspired you to pursue surgery?

My interest in surgery began when I saw patients in seemingly hopeless conditions go into the operating theatre and later come out doing well. It felt like magic. The ability of surgery to bring about such immediate change really moved me. Over time, I realized I wanted to be part of that magic, to be one of the people who give hope where there seems to be none. That sense of purpose and the opportunity to make a direct, lasting impact on patients' lives is what inspired me to pursue a career in surgery.

Before now have you conducted hydrocele surgeries?

Yes, I have. I performed hydrocele surgeries during my housemanship when I was rotated through the urology unit and during my NYSC. At the time, I primarily used the Jaboulay technique. However, in this training I have learnt the excision method which has lower risk of recurrence.

What challenges have you faced as a female surgeon doing hydrocelectomies?

I haven’t faced significant challenges specifically because I’m a female surgeon. The challenges I’ve encountered have been more technical, such as dealing with adhesions from previous surgeries or encountering unexpected anatomy. In such situations, I remain calm, reassess the field, and carefully trace my way back. I believe what matters most in surgery regardless of gender is having steady hands, the ability to think clearly under pressure, and being mentally prepared. With those in place, you’re well equipped to handle most situations in the operating room.

How do patients respond to being treated by a female surgeon?

In my experience, patients have given me their full cooperation. I've found that it really comes down to building trust and making them feel comfortable. Once they see that you're confident and you know what you're doing, they respond positively regardless of gender. Patients mainly want to feel safe. If you appear unsure or hesitant, they'll naturally question your ability. But when you carry yourself with calm confidence, they trust you and are usually very receptive.

Have you been involved in the NTD work before now?

I know about NTDs, but I have not really participated in any of the programmes. However I am happy to be here and to be part of the journey to eliminate NTDs by 2030.

After the training, how will you help the people affected and the state government?

Well, now that I have been trained, I will make myself available whenever I'm called upon to either do the surgery or help in training others. I'll be available whenever I'm called upon. I'm ever ready to help.

What advice would you give to young women aspiring to enter surgical specialties?

I get that question often from younger female colleagues who ask how I manage as a woman in surgery. I always tell them: if you have the passion for it, go for it. Passion makes a huge difference as it drives you to keep learning, to stay committed, and to push through the tough moments. Surgery is demanding, but it's also incredibly rewarding. There's something deeply fulfilling about taking a patient with a major problem like a large hydrocele through surgery, and seeing them recover well. It feels almost magical. So my advice is simple: if it excites you, if it feels meaningful, don't let anything hold you back. Go for it. You'll be glad you did.

Do you have anything you want to say to us?

Yes, I just want to say that I've truly learned a lot during this training. I'm especially grateful to Sightsavers and The Carter Center for coming to train us, and to Reaching the Last Mile Fund for providing the funding that made all of this possible. On behalf of the patients who have benefited from these free surgeries, they are my people and I want to say a big thank you. This initiative is life-changing, and I'm proud to be part of it.