

Somnath Malakar: Shalina is grooming young pharmacists to become better pharmacists through SYTA

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The Season 2 of Innovative Shalina Young Talent Award (SYTA - 2020) berthed at prestigious Radisson Blu Hotel, GRA Ikeja, Lagos on 3rd of March 2020 with the hall filled to the brim with contestants, their parents and friends, panel of judges, pharmacists and the media. Expectation were very high. The keenly contested SYTA 2020 Awards saw the emergence of the Best Pharmacy Brains in Nigeria won by Mr. Adeleke Adekunle Faid, 1st position from University of Lagos, Mr. Olarewaju Israel 2nd position from Obafemi Awolowo University and Miss Esther Damilola Olukorode from University of Ibadan took 3rd position.

In an inclusive interviews with Mr. Somnath Malakar, Managing Director of Shalina Healthcare Nigeria Limited, Clinical Health Journal intently listened to him and his management team as they glowingly spoke on the successful outing of SYTA Season 2 and its expected affects on the pharmaceutical industry. Below are excerpts of the various interviews.



Mr. Somnath Malakar
Managing Director, Shalina Healthcare
Nigeria Limited

MR. SOMNATH MALAKAR,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SHALINA
HEALTHCARE NIGERIA LIMITED

Sir, why are we here today?

As you already know, this is the second year of the initiative of Shalina Youth Talent Awards (SYTA). It is an initiative by the company to recognise that the pharmacy community is seen as one of the integral part of the healthcare system not only in the Nigeria of today, but also going forward. As we promised last year, being the maiden edition, we engaged with only three universities and we screened

almost 400 students. Then we promised that second edition, which is this year's edition will be bigger and wider in scale. From what you can see, we kept up to our promise. This year we expanded up to five universities namely; University of Lagos, University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University and Ahmadu Bello University. We were able to connect up to 700 students. Today is the finale, after the five zonal rounds in each of the universities where over 100 students actually appeared for different rounds and finally the top three got selected as qualifiers for the final day. Going forward, the plan is to make this program even more robust and extend to as many universities as possible, in order to help the students, meet their aspirations in which ever field of Pharmacology they want to pursue.

Initially what is the motive behind this Programme?

Every pharmaceutical company has different perspectives of doing business. Shalina fits their business understanding from a different angle altogether. We believe that the pharmacist community and especially the healthcare practitioners in this country should not be lacking or in short supply. It becomes imperative and almost like a responsibility for the company to also groom that channel of



L-R: Mr. Somnath Malakar, managing director, Shalina Healthcare Nigeria Limited; Shalina Young Talent Award (SYTA) 2020 winners - Mr. Olarewaju Israel 2nd position from Obafemi Awolowo University, Mr. Adeleke Adekunle Faid, 1st position from University of Lagos and Miss Esther Damilola Olukorode 3rd position from University of Ibadan. Others are Dr. Rahul Mandlik, head, medical marketing, Shalina Healthcare, Dubai and Pharm. Folorunsho Alaran, regional marketing manager, West Africa, Shalina Healthcare Nigeria Limited, at the grand finale of the 2020 SYTA programme held recently at Radisson Blu Hotel, GRA Ikeja, Lagos.

healthcare inputs. Because if they improve and start contributing to the industry then the overall healthcare system improves. We wish to get them exposed to the understanding of corporate and competitive field, helping them get into whichever pharmaceutical field of practice they want to get into - education, hospital corporate or community part of it, going forward. As the healthcare sector improves, every company stand a chance to benefit from it and do much better.

What do you expect to gain from this programme?

Our expectation is long term. If I take you back to our initiative, at a time of crisis when people were shying away from investing in this country, we were putting up a manufacturing facility. Not only because we are long term in our planning but also because we believe in the potentials of the Nigerian economy. That you've not heard any of our brands being mentioned today Even

from outside – the consumer community, that at a corporate event that none of the brands are getting promoted is very intentional and not surprising. This is because our major objective is to promote the pharmacists, and ensure they become better pharmacists going forward. End of the day, the ethos and values of Shalina Healthcare continues to be providing Quality products at Affordable rates with the best Availability and this initiative will

complement the company's endeavour towards such values that are inherent in our operations across Africa.

Pharm. Samuel Adekola, - National Chairman, Association of Community Pharmacist of Nigeria (ACPN), Pharm. Adekola, had this to say:

There is an improvement basically in terms of planning, students have enough time to prepare, quality contents and delivery both on the side of the students and the company when compared with SYTA 2019. He said there is a great future for both pharmacy and pharmacists looking at the quality of the contents presented.

He also said he is a beneficiary of such a programme in the past while he was in his part four in school. His advice for other pharmaceutical companies in the country, especially in this regard is that they should join hands with Shalina to take the industry to greater height.

I pray Shalina would have the courage to continue to maintain this because it takes some courage to start a thing and also courage to continue with its sustenance.

Dr. Kingsley Chiedu Amibor
National Chairman of the Association of Hospital & Administrative Pharmacists of Nigeria (AHAPN).

Sir being at last year event and you have seen this year's, when asked to compare the two, how will you rate it.

I have to commend Shalina Healthcare for being steadfastly in organising this event. I was very impressed with what I saw. They have only moved forward since last year in terms of organisation and the overall environment.



L-R: Mr. Somnath Malakar, managing director, Shalina Healthcare Nigeria Limited; Prof. Glory Ajayi - Dean Pharmacy Department University of Lagos (UNILAG) Shalina Young Talent Award (SYTA) 2020 1st position winner - Mr. Adeleke Adekunle Faid, from University of Lagos and Dr. Kingsley Chiedu Amibor - National Chairman of the Association of Hospital & Administrative Pharmacists of Nigeria (AHAPN) at the grand finale of the 2020 SYTA programme held recently at Radisson Blu Hotel, GRA Ikeja, Lagos.

Would you say a particular industry needs such competition to strengthens its work force?

Yes precisely. The whole thing would have been for more company to get involve in organising this kind of competition, it is unfortunate that for now it is only Shalina. I hope with time some other company will be able to key into what Shalina is doing right now because there are

obvious advantages in terms of who to patronise. The whole idea of this competition will go a long way in bringing back the reading culture among our students.

Part of the challenge these students usually have is they find it difficult having internship placement in hospital. If doctors will find it not difficult, why pharmacists.

Let me correct this impression. I work in the hospital where I am a deputy director in my hospital, Doctors also have the same challenge. One of the reasons is that the number of graduates out-number the limited spaces, and the hospitals also have limited budget. These days we try to reach out to private sectors in the pharmaceutical industry, community pharmacists to see how they can absorb interns.

Sir, I don't know if you are aware of the present Lagos State health insurance scheme that allegedly sideline pharmacists as providers? what is your take on this?

I may not have enough information. If this is true pharmacists cannot sit down and fold their hands. We'll do something about it to ensure that our people get the right value for services they are engaged in. I know that there have been complains in the past about performances, resolution chain in the community pharmacists in the energise scheme - development community pharmacists, am not sure about Lagos pharmacists being short change

Dr. Moyosore Adejumo, Director of Pharmaceutical Service, Lagos State Ministry of Health

From what you have just seen today, how will you access SYTA programme?

In one word, - "BRILLIANT". The students whether they are speaking for or against a motion, they are doing so well. They raise very valid points. Like I said, for or against, the points are there. The topics were chosen for them so they have no options. But in defending either way, they are a brilliant group of students, very mature for their years and ages. I did make a comment or two about the need to lessen the competitive aspect of it and more of having them updated on information that they are speaking about. I have volunteered, for example, to speak to them about patent medicine vendors and bring them up to date with what is happening in that particular sector. So much is happening. Am sure there are others in the panel of judges and other distinguished colleagues who are also well equipped to further enlightened the students. So for me, it is less of competition, speaking for or against and it is more of improving the knowledge, soft skills of the students' presentation and communications skills.

Are there areas of improvements?

About the programme itself? Because I wasn't here last year, it is difficult for me to say whether there have been improvement over last year's. I will see how it goes. It is a good avenue to have

the students interact in opposing camps so to speak without necessarily making themselves enemies of each other. It is an innovative strategy.

Do you think, it is a programme that other pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria should also embrace?

Or maybe join hands to strengthen this particular one. It might be SHALINA today and we may have other companies who want to strengthen and make it bigger than what it is now. Yes, there is opportunity for that, and am sure it will go down well.

Of what value will this kind of competition be to the pharmaceutical industry?

We are increasing the knowledge of the students. We are equipping them with the knowledge they may not necessarily have right now for moving forward. You can see the questions that are were asked. Some of them are outside the topics for the debate. The essence is to further empower the students, improve their knowledge in certain areas they may not have been exposed to while in school and also enhance their presentation skill just as the managing director of Shalina said.