

The Admiral of Strategy: Surgeon Rear Admiral AB Afolayan (Rtd) Charts the Course for Defence Health Maintenance Limited (DHML)

IN Nigerian healthcare administration, the recognition of truly strategic leadership is paramount. The Guardian's spotlight on the 100 Most Strategic CEOs of 2025 reserves a place for Surgeon Rear Admiral Azeez Bayo AFOLAYAN (Rtd), the Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of Defence Health Maintenance Limited (DHML). Appointed to this critical role in July 2020, Admiral Afolayan, a retired two-star general officer of the Nigerian Navy, represents the confluence of profound military discipline and specialized medical expertise.

Surgeon Rear Admiral Afolayan is not merely an administrator; he is characterized as a colossal figure in Naval and Nigerian Armed Forces medical circles, bringing over thirty years of experience in the rigorous practice of military medicine and health administration to DHML. His appointment signifies the strategic choice of a leader whose background is fundamentally rooted in commanding complex operations and managing extensive personnel networks.

The Foundation of an Expert Strategist

The Admiral's educational journey laid a deep foundation for his later strategic accomplishments. He attended Primary education in Iludun-Oro, Kwara State, followed by his Secondary School education at Government Secondary School, Omu-Aran, Kwara State. He furthered his studies at Federal Government College, Warri, which led to his admission to the Medical School at the University of Ibadan in 1974.

He achieved his Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MB, BS) degree from the University of Ibadan in 1979. Demonstrating an early commitment to specialization and excellence, he completed a Medical Residency programme at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, in 1995, graduating as a Consultant Paediatrician and a Fellow of the West African College of Physicians.

A Distinguished Career of Command
The military career of Surgeon Rear Admiral Afolayan provided the crucible in which his strategic leadership skills were forged. He was commissioned into the Nigerian Navy in 1982. His dedication to professional development is evident in his academic pursuits within the Armed Forces, having completed both the Junior and Senior Staff Courses in 1987 and 1997, respectively, at the prestigious Armed Forces Command and Staff College (AFCSC), Jaji. His distinguished service was further recognized through decorations including the General Service Star (GSS), Defence Service Star (DSS), Meritorious Service Star (MSS), and the Forces Service Star (FSS).

His tenure saw him serve in various capacities, both afloat and ashore, culminating in appointments that required immense strategic oversight and logistical prowess. Notably, he was twice appointed Director of Medical Services, Naval Headquarters, Abuja, serving two terms from 2009 to 2012 and again from 2014 to 2015. Between these highly demanding roles, he served as the Director, Medical



Defence Health Maintenance Limited

The Military HMO

Administration and Logistics, Defence Headquarters, Abuja from 2012 to 2014. Before achieving these zenith roles, his command experience included leading the Nigerian Navy Reference Hospital, Ojo (2006-2009), and the Obiesesan Naval Medical Centre (1999-2001).

Strategic Influence Beyond Nigerian Shores

Admiral Afolayan's strategic reach extended globally, reflecting his recognition as a leader in military medicine. He held the esteemed position of Secretary General of the Pan African Committee of Military Medicine from 2001 to 2005. Furthermore, he served as the Director General of the 39th World Congress of Military Medicine held in Abuja in 2012. Domestically, his expertise was relied upon at the highest regulatory level, where he represented the Nigerian Armed Forces on the Board of the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria from 2004 to 2005.

These appointments underscore his capacity to manage complex, international, and regulatory frameworks—skills indispensable to steering a national Health Maintenance Organisation (HMO).

Guiding DHML to Enviable Heights

The journey began with the Pioneering MD/CEO Commodore BA Sani (Rtd) - (2005-2014), Commodore AA Abdulai (Rtd) 2014 - 2020 and upon assuming the MD/CEO role in July 2020, Surgeon Rear Admiral Afolayan (Rtd) inherited an organisation with a solid foundation, established by the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of Nigeria, and incorporated in 2005. Under his leadership, DHML has continued to take giant strides and has been elevated to enviable heights both operationally and in infrastructural holding.

His strategic leadership has ensured DHML continues to manage the vast logistical network that defines its operation. DHML's success is built upon leveraging partnerships with a widespread network of civil and military Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Health Care Providers, including Diagnostic Centres, nationwide. While the organisation commenced full operations in 2006 with 149 Health Care Providers (HCPs), Admiral Afolayan now oversees a network that has strategically expanded to 935 HCPs reporting through twenty-three state offices and the HQ at FCT by 2025.

The infrastructural enhancements under his tenure reflect his commitment to leveraging modern technology for strategic efficiency. Although the commencement of e-registration and the Call Centre began in 2012, this system has been strategically redesigned and upgraded. This culminated in the launch of the Integrated Health Management System (IHMS) in 2023 and 2025, providing all stakeholders with a 21st-century, user-friendly, cutting-edge technology platform. This system manages critical administrative and medical processes, including Code Authorisation, Bill and claims manage-

ment, Accounting, and the payment platform.

His tenure has also seen the continuation of DHML's strategic expansion efforts, such as the 2024 division of Lagos operations into two state offices: Lagos FESTAC and Lagos Moloney, a necessary adjustment due to Lagos State representing approximately 30% of total enrollees and 25% of HCPs.

Furthermore, the organisation's operational model and growth remain so influential that they have attracted attention from emerging HMOs, including those of the Nigerian Police and the Federal Road Safety Corp, which have engaged to study DHML's strategic model. This peer recognition underscores the effective administration and strategic positioning that Admiral Afolayan commands. It is also important that the operations of DHML received Presidential declaration in 2023.

The Visionary Goal

The MD/CEO's strategic commitment extends to realising a long-term vision conceived by the pioneering MD/CEO, Commodore BA Sani (Rtd), and assiduously pursued by successors, including Admiral Afolayan. This vision involves the pursuit to establish a Military Veteran Hospital and Wellness Centre, a blueprint modelled on world-class facilities such as the Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre in the US and the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine in England. The strategic aim is profound: to provide world-class tertiary healthcare services that generate unprecedented gains for the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) and significantly reduce the necessity for Nigerians to seek medical care outside the nation's shores.

Surgeon Rear Admiral Afolayan's comprehensive background as a Consultant Paediatrician, his membership in professional bodies like the Nigeria Medical Association and the Paediatrics Association of Nigeria, and his status as a Fellow of the Chartered Administrative Institute, solidify his position as a multidimensional leader capable of strategic execution in both the medical and corporate spheres. His leadership since 2020 confirms that Defence Health Maintenance Limited is

guided by one of the most strategic minds in the country, ensuring that DHML not only meets but constantly raises the bar for healthcare administration.

