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Mgba okpukpu- The Traditional Igbo Bone Setting And Bone Healing Process.

By Maduagwu Nzubechi

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Awusigwe ogwo, a dibia okpukpu with a patient who is fully healed with a well aligned leg that has gone back to the original state in Amorka, Anambra state.

Photo credit : ogwo family archives

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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Mgba Okpukpu is the nomenclature for bone setting in Alaigbo, its an age long tradition among ndi igbo. Ndi b’anyi na si na “ ekele onye Akidi, ogwu onye ozo” meaning when a healer is praised, he heals another person. This is true about ndi Mgba Okpukpo or Dibia okpukpo, they have been treating people since the dawn of time.

Bonesetting or mgba okpukpu is an ancient osteopathic discipline where practitioners specialize in treating bone fractures, dislocations, ligament sprains, spinal pains, muscle cramps, and muscular pains. Similar to modern medical practices like physiotherapy. Most of their patients ranged from palm wine tappers that fell off on duty or oil palm tree cutters and others who also faced bone fractures, dislocations, ligament sprains, spinal pains, muscle cramps, and muscular pains.



Awusigwe ogwo, a dibia okpukpu treating a spinal cord injury patient in Amorka, Anambra state. Photo credit: ogwo family archives

01

Background of Ndi Na Gba Okpukpu

Most of these healers are seen as divine healers and that the skill was given to them by divine providence. Although the skills are mostly passed down from generation to generation across bloodlines, apprenticeship was and still is a big part of how this very important skill is kept alive.



Awusigwe ogwo, a dibia okpukpu wrapping up the splint after setting a broken leg in Amorka, Anambra state.
Photo credit: ogwo family archives

02

How Traditional Bone Setters Diagnose And Treat Bone Setting Issues

Most times it starts with person to person conversation between the patient and dibia okpukpu. Followed by the onye mgbà okpukpu pressing their fingers on the affected area to determine how severe the injury is, also they look out for lesions and other bodily reactions that indicate contamination or severity of the injury. After this diagnosis above, the bone is set by either massaging it with a set of techniques that eases the bones back in. Or in a case of a large bone fracture, it is set in using a metal bone setting toll like a clamp which eases the broken bone slowly albeit painfully but this helps. After the

bones have been set back to their original form, herbs like uhie, abuba eke and other healing potions that help heal and gel the bones together and massaged onto the area of interest. Ibara is used to splint the bone (area of concentration). Then akwa is tied around it and achara is placed evenly in strategic areas in line with the ibara and akwa to keep it firm and in place before the final covering. And periodically every oke uka (every 16 days) the bone is set in by hand to make sure it is in alignment.



Awusigwe ogwo, a dibia okpukpu diagnosing and treating a patient while tutoring her assistants in Amorka, Anambra state. Photo credit: ogwo family archives

- Ibe Okpukpu – A metal rod used to guide broken bones into alignment.
- Ibara & Achara- Sticks and bamboo used as a rigid splint to immobilize the limb.
- Akwa – used to cushion the area of interest
- Uhie & Okwuma- Camwood and Shea butter used to reduce inflammation and soothe the skin.
- Nzu – calabash chalk



- Akanwu -potash
- Eluaku/ Eluaki -(palm kernel oil),
- Abuba Eke- Python oil, highly prized for its perceived ability to penetrate and “knit” bones.

03

Rituals And Divinations Associated With Mgba Okpukpu

Bone setting is regarded as a spiritual process in igbo culture and its believed that evil omen should be cleared for the healing process to be complete. For this chicken, yam, ose orji is given ndi agwu to appease the outer worldly forces who may be connected to the unpleasant circumstances.

Mgba okpukpu is practiced by both genders and not restricted to one.

04

Mgba Okpukpu In Modern Times

Today most bone setters in alaigbo have incorporate the use of X-ray during diagnosis and treatment, they have also incorporated the use of cotton and bandages instead of akwa, use of spirits, antiseptics for cleaning fractures that come with open wounds, and collaborating with modern medicine in treatment of associated illnesses that are fracture related. But they have stayed true to the core of their practice and it's very surreal to know that with Mgba okpukpu, the chances of amputation is very, very low.



Awusigwe ogwo, a dibia okpukpu with a patient who is fully healed with a well aligned leg that has gone back to the original state in Amorka, Anambra state. Photo credit: ogwo family archives

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nzubechi is a history, political enthusiast who dabbles into social commentary once in a while



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