



Uncommon Partners: Combatting Infectious Diseases in Nigeria

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Collaboration amongst and with microbiologists continue to contribute to major breakthroughs in public health. The following examples illustrate recent roles of unusual partners in infectious disease control in Nigeria.

Nigeria's polio eradication programme and Onchocerciasis (River Blindness) control programme have been majorly supported by Rotary and Lions Club respectively. The two non-profit, international organisations provide humanitarian services all over the world through its members; business leaders. Such decade long partnerships by social clubs are uncommon in Nigeria as the norm has been Foundations dedicated to employ, train & collaborate with health workers.

Another example; the Ebola epidemic of 2014 had an unusually aggressive media blitz which contributed to very few fatalities. The very urgent, well-crafted partnership/strategy was similarly utilized in dealing with the more recent monkey pox infections in year 2017.

People already infected with Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) over the decades have been active advocates of AIDS control measures such as voluntary testing, compliance to drug regimen and discouraging stigmatization. Incidence is now declining. For this strategy, those with the infection have become well organised partners for control!

Uncommon partnerships have also resulted from the availability of effective drugs for hitherto life-threatening ailments. Cancer survivors acquiring chronic infections, are now major beneficiaries of evolving methods for combating co-morbidities. Health care is made cheaper for the often times, cash strapped population. The partnering champions include facility-based specialists who become more easily accessible to home-based care providers. Others include local laboratory scientists who design simple, personalised alert systems for the co-morbidities.

The final example in this paper is the role of schools as mainstay partners not just in traditional, childhood immunisation & helminthiasis control programmes. Teachers are now partners in ensuring vaccinations that prevent adult onset cervical cancer.

It is hoped that partnerships across professions, social & educational strata would continue to manifest as new disease patterns emerge.

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