



## ROLES OF HEALTH EDUCATORS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER DISEASE OUTBREAK IN NIGERIAN COMMUNITIES

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### Abstract

*The role of health educators before, during and after disease outbreak cannot be overemphasized. Health education all over the world is seen as a combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and community members improve their health by increasing their knowledge and attitude positively towards a healthy lifestyle. This paper examined the roles of health educators before, during and after outbreak of disease in the community. Concept of health education which is a method through which health workers can disseminate correct information to people to change their preconceived ideas about health matters and correct their opinions thereby promoting healthy living was examined. Concepts of diseases, causes, clinical features, preventive measures and management of diseases were also examined. Conclusion was drawn on the roles of health educators during and after outbreak of diseases while necessary recommendations were made on the need to create awareness on importance of personal hygiene and compliance with its rules.*

**Keywords:** Health, Disease, Outbreak, Education, Community

### Introduction

From time immemorial, man has been interested in trying to control disease. The medical man, the priest, the herbalist and the magicians, all tried in various ways to cure man's disease and bring relief to the sick. Medical knowledge about disease has been derived to a very great degree from the intuitive and observational propositions and cumulative experiences gleaned from others. Park (2007) asserted that presently the commitment of all countries under the banner of World Health Organization is to wipe out occurrence of diseases in

the world and to attain the goal of health for all globally. More importantly, the goal of health care is not merely treatment of diseases but prevention of the quality of life of individuals and communities.

Health is a common thing in most cultures. Almost all communities have their concept of health as part of their culture. In some cultures, health is seen as absence of disease while others view it as 'being at peace with self', the community, god and cosmos. In the past, health was a neglected entity



despite lip service by individuals, community and government of its importance. However, during the past few decades, there has been a reawakening of the fact that health is a fundamental human right and a worldwide social goal that is necessary to the satisfaction of basic human needs and improved quality of life to be attained by all the people. Health is one of the terms which most people find difficult to define though they are confident of its meaning.

Therefore many definitions of health have been offered from time to time including the following:

- Health is a condition of being sound in body, mind or spirit especially freedom from physical disease or pain, “Webster”

- It was viewed as a state of relative equilibrium of body functions which result from successful dynamic adjustment to forces tending to disturb it among others.

- At the World Health Summit held in 1948, the widely accepted definition of health was given by the World Health Organization in the preamble of its constitution as follows: “Health is a state of complete, physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” Recently, the definition was expanded to include ability to lead a socially and economically productive life.

Disease has been defined by many people; Webster defined disease as a condition in which the body's health is impaired, a departure from a state of health, an alteration of the human body

thereby interrupting the performance of vital functions. Oxford dictionary defines disease as “a condition in which the functions of some part of the organs of body are disrupted. The researchers viewed disease as any deviation from normal functioning or state of complete physical or mental well-being.

### **Concept of Health**

Health according to World Health Organization is a state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is a fundamental human right. Healthy life ensures a productive life. Better health is central to human happiness and well-being, it also makes an important contribution to economic progress, as healthy population live longer, are more productive and they serve their nation more. There are many factors that influence health status and a country's ability to provide quality health services for its people.

Health has various meaning and interpretation to many people. Health is viewed as the condition of being sound in body, mind and spirit especially freedom from physical illness or pain. Ajayi (2004) defined health as soundness of body and mind which helps an individual to function fully and to efficiently discharge given responsibilities. Park (2007) asserted that despite the importance of health, many people failed to value it as an accept. At the individual level, health is usually subjugated for other needs considered as more important such as



wealth, power, prestige, knowledge and security. Observation shows that health is often taken for granted and its value is not fully understood until it is lost. Park (2007) noted that at the international level, health was forgotten when the covenant of the League of Nations was drafted after the First World War. Health was again 'forgotten' when the charter of the United Nations was drafted at the end of Second World War.

In recent years however, there has been a reawakening that health is a fundamental human right and a world-wide social need that is essential for the satisfaction of basic human needs and to improve the quality of life of all and sundry in the society. Bradley (2003) asserted that "health is the thing that makes us feel that now is the time to function". An adage says that he who has health has hope and he who has hope has everything. Health is a condition that enables an individual to mobilize all his resources intellectually emotionally and physically for optimum living towards the attainment of set goals and objectives thus, the healthier we are, the greater our potentials for effectiveness (Lucas and Gilles, 2007). Health is a term that summarizes the condition in which an individual is emotionally stable, mentally alert and socially well-adjusted to himself and the society he belongs to.

### **Concept of Health Education**

Health is an important factor in national development. The test of civilization in any nation is the

measure of consideration and attention which it gives to the health of its citizenry. The United Nation, World Health Organization and other Health agencies now use health as a parameter for measuring the wealth of a nation.

Health education is the organized teaching procedures directed towards developing understanding, attitudes and practice relating to health and factors affecting health (Alebiosu 2015). Health education seems to be a very vital element of health whose goal is to bring about desirable changes in attitudes and practice and not merely teaching people the rules of hygiene. Udor (2000) asserted that Health education is designed to prepare the masses to make proper decision throughout their life time on matters affecting their health, healthy living in form of personal hygiene, food hygiene, environmental hygiene, prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases and the health of the family. Moronkola (2003) viewed health education as the health programme directed to meet the health needs of the community with the support of individual, home and government. Park (2007) defined health education as the section of the health process primarily concerned with developing an understanding of health and providing necessary experiences and services which play a key role in the maintenance and improvement of health of the communities. Fodor and Dolis (2002) posited that health education refers to a plan that provides for the sequential arrangement of learning opportunities



designed to favourably influence health values, attitudes, practices and cognitive capabilities that are conducive to the optimum development of the individual, family and community.

It was observed that right from the beginning, individuals and communities have sought to protect their health by controlling diseases, improving the environment, caring for the sick and protecting their food and water supplies from any form of contamination. Health education is the section of health field with the goal of promoting health attitude and behaviour through systematic awareness creation to the communities on health programme. Moronkola and Okanlawon (2003) posited that effective health education empowers the consumers in the community to manage their own health process effectively and to cope with social and economic challenges arising from illnesses and diseases while Otinwa (2005) added that health education is aimed at behavioural change. The change could be achieved by making people in the community to understand and feel the need to do so regardless of the problem. The researcher also observed that the way sickness is being handled in public health is a major problem that could lead to multiplication of diseases in the society. Seeking early medical advice by clients and care givers is always the last resort as clients will neglect the symptoms until the disease or illness becomes aggravated. Often times, they consult traditional healers,

spiritualists, churches and make health practitioners their last result hence the high morbidity and mortality rates of these diseases in the community.

### **Concept of Diseases**

A disease is an abnormal condition that negatively affects the structure or functions of all or part of an organism. Diseases are understood to be medical conditions that involve pathological process associated with a specific set of symptoms. Williams, Dante and Scarpel (2020) posited that disease is any deviation from the normal structural or functional state of an organism generally associated with certain signs and symptoms and differing in nature from physical injury. A disease organism commonly exhibits signs or symptoms indicative of its abnormal state. Thus, the normal condition of an organism must be understood in order to recognise the hallmarks of disease. Nevertheless, a sharp demarcation between disease and health is not always apparent. A disease is also a disorder of structure or function in human beings that produces specific symptoms or that affects a specific location and is not simply a direct result of physical injury.

A disease is also defined as an impairment of the normal state of the living animal or plant body or one of its parts that interrupts or modifies the performance of the vital functions. It is manifested by distinguishing signs and symptoms. It is also a response to environmental factor.



## **Types of Diseases**

There are major types. These are Communicable or Infectious diseases and Non-communicable diseases e.g Deficiency disease, Hereditary disease including genetic and non-genetic disease, Physiological disease and Industrial diseases.

## **Mode of Transmission of Disease**

The mode of transmission can be through Direct method, Inherited method or Intermediate host. For example, malaria fever can be transmitted through mosquito. Types and nature of disease that affect human beings are inherited diseases, congenital, deficiency, industrial, environmental and infectious.

## **Factors Aiding the Spread of Diseases**

- Overcrowding
- Exposure to cold and drought
- Poor ventilation and lightning
- Poor sanitation
- Lack of health facilities
- Poor quality housing e.g. crack building that can allow breeding of vectors
- Poor health habits- coughing, sneezing without covering the mouth

## **Causes of Diseases**

- When the initial cause of the disease state may lie within the individual organism, the disease is called idiopathic, innate primary or essential
- The disease that result from a course or medical treatment either as an unavoidable side effect or because the treatment itself was ill-advised, the

disease is said to be iatrogenic

- Disease can also be due to some agents external in the organism such as a chemical that is toxic agent. Such disease is called non-communicable because it affects only the individual organism exposed to it.

The external agent may be a living organism capable of multiplying within the host and subsequently infecting other organisms; hence it is termed communicable. E.g. Corona-virus (COVID-19), measles, hepatitis. Non-Communicable diseases are long-lasting and progress-slowly and they are sometimes referred to as chronic diseases. They can arise from environmental exposure or from genetically determined abnormalities which may be evident at birth or may appear later in life. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) has identified four major types of non-communicable diseases as cancer, respiratory disease (e.g heart attack, stroke) chronic respiratory disease e.g asthma and diabetes mellitus. WHO estimates that these four groups of conditions combined accounts for 82% of all deaths from non-communicable diseases.

## **Communicable Disease**

Communicable or contagious diseases are those transmitted from one organism to another. Infectious diseases are diseases caused by infection with living and therefore replicating microorganisms such as animal parasites, bacteria, fungi or viruses. Practically, these two classes of diseases are the same because



infectious diseases are also communicable or transmissible from one host to another. Infectious disease is a leading cause of death worldwide both in children and young adults.

### Signs and Symptoms of Disease

Signs and symptoms vary depending on the organism causing the infection but they include the following:

1. Fever and fatigue
- Mild infections which may need home remedies
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Muscle aches and pains
- Coughing

### Major signs and symptoms that need medical attention

2. Difficulty in breathing
3. High fever 38°C and above
4. Cough of over 3 weeks
5. Severe headache with fever
6. Experiencing a rash or swelling
7. Unexplained and prolonged fever
8. Sudden vision problems e.g blurred vision.

### Prevention

- Health education to create awareness for the masses on causes of diseases and ways to prevent diseases
- Mild disease may respond to rest and home remedies
- Health education on personal and environmental hygiene
- Communicable diseases such as measles, chicken pox or tuberculosis can be prevented through vaccines
- Frequent and thorough hand-

washing with soap and running water

- Improved lifestyle can go a long way in preventing diseases e.g avoiding sedentary lifestyle.

### Prevention

To prevent the spread of disease in our communities, these tips must be followed:

1. Proper hand washing techniques: this is very important before and after preparing food, before eating and after using the toilet. Hands must be washed thoroughly with soap and water.
2. Eating of balanced and healthy diet is necessary to remain sound and healthy. An unhealthy diet is one of the major risk factors for a range of chronic diseases including cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and obesity (Adedoyin 2017)
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands because it is the common entry route of germs to the body
4. **Immunization:** This can drastically reduce the chances of contracting many diseases both for children and adult population
5. Adequate and nutritious diet is very important for healthy living. This will build up the body immunity and ensure the normal functioning of all the systems and organs of the body and increase ability to resist invading micro-organisms
6. Stay at home when you are ill. It is



expedient and safer to stay at home when you experience mild fever or diarrhoea. Children who are ill should be excused from the school until they are better to avoid infecting others in the school

7. **Ensure food preparation is safe.** Proper hygiene should be ensured while cooking and normal cooking temperature should also be maintained. Foods should be properly kept to avoid contamination through insects and pests.

8. **Avoid sharing personal items:** ensure the use of personal toothbrush, comb and razor. Avoid sharing drinking glasses or dinning utensils. Underwear should not be shared or pass to another person

9. **Practice safe sex:** Ensure the use of condom if you or your partner has a history of sexually transmitted infections or life-risk behaviour

10. **Travel wisely:** If the need to travel out of your base arises, ensure you take proper vaccinations such as yellow fever, cholera, hepatitis A or B or typhoid fever vaccine

11. **Regular medical Check-up:** It is necessary to go for medical checkup periodically at least twice a year for general medical checkup to detect any abnormality, treat it and to ensure the normal functioning of the body system

12. **Quarantine:** Any suspected case of infectious disease should be isolated and put under surveillance for

the given number of days to ascertain their health status before being allowed to continue their normal life in the community.

13. Exercise moderately every day to remain healthy as sedentary lifestyle could be very dangerous.

### **The Role of Health Educators during Outbreak of Disease**

Health education has a key role to play in disease outbreaks because it can offer well- established approaches that can be utilized as part of a response. The critical point is that disease outbreaks can only be fully addressed by helping people to empower themselves rather than trying to change their behaviour

- Creating high power awareness through the mass media like radio, television. Running jingles is highly significant in preventing and treating disease outbreak.

- There should be isolation of infected cases while mounting surveillance on them and their contacts to reduce spread of disease in the community.

- Contact with infectious diseases and infected individual should be reduced to the minimum

- In diseases outbreak, it is the duty of health educators to exercise emergency powers in response to the outbreak by creating awareness

- The health educator is to collaborate with other health workers to develop adequate response plans in the event of an outbreak or epidemic

- Targeted health education



through practical health information to particular groups and sub-population is very important to control disease. E.g health education on importance of personal hygiene to nursing mothers, aged and market women

- The importance of adequate intake of well-balanced nutrients is very important during the outbreak of disease as this will ensure adequate immunity required to withstand the stress of the disease

- Adequate immunization required to stay safe must be given to the masses to ensure the community is free from pandemic diseases.

- The health educators must ensure training and re-training of health and social workers to update their knowledge and ensure they are well equipped for the task of preventing the spread of the disease in the community.

- Adequate and prompt release of fund necessary to combat the disease through purchase of enough drugs, equipment, training and re-training of health workers and ensure the hospital environment is adequately equipped to face the emerging situation should be done by the government

- Government should set up task force to ensure compliance with laid-down principles that will make the community free from pandemic.

- Adequate punishment should be meted out on non-compliance to the rules of healthiness in the community during outbreak of disease to achieve the set goals and objectives out of the disease.

- Periodic evaluation and re-appraisal of the effectiveness of set

goals and objectives would be carried out to ensure the set goals and objectives are achieved.

### **Conclusion**

Conclusion was drawn on the fact that health educators' role before, during and after outbreak of diseases cannot be overemphasized. Effective health education that could help to change people's unhealthy behaviour can only be achieved through mass campaign on radio, television, use of jingles, whatsapp messages and use of youtube and other devices that could pass information across to the populace.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion above, the following recommendations were made:

- Awareness should be created for people through health education on the need for change of lifestyle by avoiding dirty environments, improved life of personal and environmental hygiene, eating of healthy diets, avoiding sedentary lifestyle that could cause health problems and engaging in regular exercise that would aid effective circulation of blood throughout all the systems and organs of the body thereby ensuring healthiness.

- Government should encourage training and re-training of health workers in all fields of health viz doctors, nurses, pharmacists, all forms of technicians to equip them to measure up to the expected standard and demands of present day diseases.

- Government should also ensure provision of necessary instrument,





equipment, infrastructure and necessary and qualified health personnel to enhance effective functioning of the various health centers and hospitals in the nation.

- Government should establish more health care facilities all over the country to meet up with the health needs of people in the rural and urban. Adequate healthy life and effective treatment of those who have diseases are vital issues that could not be neglected in a healthy society.

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