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## Proceedings

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# Clinical students' knowledge and perception of Lassa fever in Benin City, Nigeria

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## Abstract

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**Purpose:** To assess the knowledge and perception of Lassa fever among full-time undergraduate clinical students of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), Benin City, Nigeria.

**Methods:** A cross sectional descriptive study at UNIBEN main campus. Self-administered questionnaire were used to collect the respondents' socio-demographics, information on knowledge and perception of Lassa fever. Data obtained were analyzed with SPSS version 21, descriptive statistics were done and frequencies and proportions were used to summarize variables of interest. Association between Socio demographic characteristics and awareness was carried out using Chi square. Level of significance was set at 95% confidence interval ( $p < 0.05$ ). Ethical considerations were observed.

**Results:** Of the 260 respondents, 111(42.7%) were females. The mean age of the respondents was 23.5 ± 1.2 years and were from the four disciplines involved with clinical training which are; Pharmacy, Medicine, Dentistry and Optometry. Most of the respondents,

257(98.8%) had a good knowledge of what Lassa fever is, its symptoms, causes, risk factors, control and prevention of Lassa fever epidemic, but a few of them; 64(24.6%) knew the drug used for treatment of Lassa fever. Also, 256(98.5%) of the respondents demonstrated a positive perception towards reporting any suspected case of Lassa fever on Campus or in the hospital setting where their Clinical clerkship is done. These students reported that the social media was the main source of information about the disease (78.1%) followed by their lecturers and study materials (38.5%).

**Conclusion:** Clinical students of UNIBEN demonstrated a good knowledge and positive perception of Lassa fever. Awareness campaigns and public health education are important means of communicating health information to the clinical students, health care providers and the general public.

**Keywords:** Lassa fever, clinical students, Ribavirin, Knowledge, perception

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**Indexing:** Index Copernicus, African Index Medicus

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## Background

Lassa fever is an acute virulent viral hemorrhagic illness with high morbidity and mortality rates. It is a disease of global concern and adequate knowledge relating to this disease is vital in the hospitals, rural or urban setting.

## Aim/Objectives

The purpose of this study was to assess the knowledge and perception of Lassa fever among

full-time undergraduate clinical students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

## Materials and Methods

A cross sectional descriptive study of clinical students was carried out at the UNIBEN main campus. Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the respondents' socio-demographics, information on knowledge and perception of Lassa fever. Data obtained were

analyzed with SPSS version 21, descriptive statistics were done and frequencies and proportions were used to summarize variables of interest. Association between Socio demographic characteristics and awareness was carried out using Chi square. Level of significance was set at 95% confidence interval ( $p < 0.05$ ). Ethical considerations were observed.

## Results

Of the 260 respondents, 111 (42.7%) were females. The mean age of the respondents was  $23.5 \pm 1.2$  years and were from the four disciplines involved with clinical training which are; Pharmacy, Medicine, Dentistry and Optometry of diverse culture and religion. Most of the respondents, 257 (98.8%) had a good knowledge of what Lassa fever is, its symptom, causes, risk factors, control and prevention of Lassa fever epidemic, but a few of them; 64 (24.6%) knew the drug used for treatment of Lassa fever. Also, 256 (98.5%) of the respondents demonstrated a positive perception towards reporting any suspected case of Lassa fever on Campus or in the hospital setting where their Clinical clerkship is done. These students reported that the social media was the main source of information about the disease (78.1%) followed by their lecturers and study materials (38.5%).

## Discussion

The high level of knowledge of Lassa fever reported in this study was similar to similar to a study conducted by Adebayo *et al.* (2015) [1] among health care workers in two teaching Hospitals in Nigeria but contrary to that obtained by Izegebu *et al.* (2006) [2] where a low level of knowledge (21%) was reported among health care workers. Knowledge relating to the source of information for Lassa fever was best obtained from Social media; this might be as a result of increased enlightenment programs using the media from series of outbreaks which occurred previously [3,4]. Lecturers were second to social media as a source of information and this is expected because it is a University setting and Clinical students are expected to be taught about Lassa fever. The sources of information on Lassa fever identified in this study agreed with findings from another study reported by Aigberemolen *et al.* [5]. Although the study population had a good knowledge of Lassa fever, there is a general, limited knowledge to the availability of a drug for the treatment of Lassa

fever. This is again contrary to the research carried out by Adebayo *et al.* [1] among health workers were almost all (90.1%) of the surveyed respondents knew that Ribavirin is used to treat Lassa fever; this is significant because Ribavirin is currently the only treatment available. Respondents were generally ignorant of the nonexistence of a vaccine for the disease as noted in a study by Tobin *et al.* [6]. A positive perception ( $P < 0.05$ ) towards conducting enlightenment campaign on campus and reporting any suspected case of Lassa fever was demonstrated by the respondents.

## Conclusion

Clinical students of UNIBEN demonstrated a good knowledge and positive perception of Lassa fever. Awareness campaigns and public health education are important means of communicating health information to the clinical students, health care providers and the general public.

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