



# ACE-PUTOR and SPH create awareness on Lassa Fever and the Novel Coronavirus

## Welcome Address by the Centre Leader

I feel greatly honoured to stand here before such a distinguished gathering of my teachers, renowned academics, key players in the health sector, staff and students at the University of Port Harcourt. As Leader of the Africa Centre of Excellence for Public Health and Toxicological Research, I warmly welcome everyone first to the University of Port Harcourt and to the sensitization forum on viral epidemics especially the 2019 novel Coronavirus – a current global threat and the Lassa Fever Virus – locally ravaging our people and healthcare workers. We live in an interconnected world and **Globalization** which promotes the flow of information, goods, capital, and people across political and geographic boundaries also allows infectious **diseases** to rapidly spread around the world. I do not want to pre-empt what you would learn here but I can assure you that we have here the absolute best to deliver the lectures and plenary.

PUTOR is a platform for providing inter-disciplinary academic stream of postgraduate programmes aimed at rapidly bridging the current paucity of adequately trained personnel with terminal degrees in environmental health and toxicology in sub-Saharan Africa. Our mission is to be a platform for congregating highly skilled human resource from within and outside UniPort; build a robust resource of highly skilled and motivated public health professionals who are equipped with current knowledge, skills and competencies required to improve the training and practice in public health & toxicology; produce cutting-edge research projects; undertake consultancy and community services.

Since inception, my team had worked so hard and demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to excellence in achieving our core mandates. The PUTOR ecosystem have enrolled a total of 203 masters and PhD students of which 7 are regional students. A total of 100 postgraduate students

have also undergone internship placements in industries partnering with the Centre. We are promoting the deployment of innovative pedagogical techniques built around problem-based learning, flipped classroom, situated learning, blended learning and simulations.

We appreciate all of you especially our stakeholders who have come from far and wide to grace this auspicious event. You are incredibly special to us and I hope you find this forum interesting and stimulating. Let me specifically appreciate my Vice Chancellor who directed that this sensitization forum be organized just about a week ago and provided enormous support and encouragement. I extend my appreciation to members of my management team, School of Public Health, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine and last but not the least the Organising team.

Thanks once more for your support and may I seize this opportunity to also invite you to the upcoming lecture and stakeholders' engagement on the black soot coming up in this venue next Wednesday by 10am.

**Daprim S. Ogaji**

## **Proceedings during the Event**

As Lassa Fever and Novel Coronavirus continue to spread fear amongst the Nigerian populace, the University of Port Harcourt - World Bank Africa Centre of Excellence in Public Health and Toxicological Research (ACE-PUTOR), has teamed up with the School of Public Health and the Faculty of Science to sensitise members of the University Community and other stakeholders on how to safeguard themselves against the two killer viruses. No clear figures have been declared by relevant Nigerian health authorities about the mortality rate of Lassa Fever, but it is estimated that no fewer than 500 persons die in endemic zones of the country each year. The deadly *Novel Coronavirus* which originated from Wuhan, China, has so far afflicted about 57,000 persons, while close to 2,000 victims have died in Nigeria.

Declaring open the one-day sensitisation forum on the two viruses at the Ebitimi Banigo Auditorium on Tuesday, February 11, 2020, the immediate past Vice Chancellor, Professor Ndowa Lale, commended the programme organisers for mounting the enlightenment forum. "Let us listen to the medical experts and heed their advice to avoid contracting Lassa Fever and Novel Coronavirus which are deadly diseases in Nigeria. We should also help to spread the information from the experts to stop the spread of Lassa Fever and Coronavirus," the erstwhile Vice Chancellor told the gathering that attracted stakeholders from outside the University.

In his address, ACE-PUTOR Centre Leader, Dr Daprim Ogaji, said: “This sensitisation forum on viral epidemics, especially the 2019 Novel Coronavirus which are currently ravaging our people and healthcare workers is especially important to us at PUTOR. The forum was initiated by the Vice Chancellor, who charged us to raise awareness about the scourge. We live in an interconnected global world in which information, goods, capital, and people move at lightning speed across borders. The free movement of people across national boundaries also render all of us vulnerable to the spread of emergent infectious diseases as the Novel Coronavirus pandemic has proved.”

On his part, Deputy Director of the School of Public Health (SPH), Professor Charles Tobin-West, expressed gratitude to the Management of the University for initiating the enlightenment forum. “We need to be enlightened and equipped to help spread the message to others in time to save more lives. Public Health is known as population medicine because everybody is involved through the promotion of preventive healthy practices and provision of relevant health information to the various stakeholders. It is important for everybody to understand that diseases are not controlled by drugs alone, but by hygienic practices and other prevent measures,” he added.

Delivering a lecture entitled: “Lassa Fever and Novel Coronavirus: An Overview of What we know and What we need to do,” Consultant Infectious Diseases and Respiratory Physician, Dr Datonye Alasia, disclosed that “Lassa Fever is transmitted to humans through contact with the droppings and urines of multimammate rats, and from human to human through bodily secretions.” He noted that common manifestations included fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, sore throat and so on, while about 80 to 85 per cent of victims are asymptomatic (they may not fall ill). Dr Alasia explained that Novel Coronavirus affects the respiratory system, just like the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which broke out in Asia in 2003. He listed fever, cough, difficulty in breathing, muscular pain and tiredness, as some of the symptoms associated with Coronavirus.

In her lecture on: “Infection Prevention and Control for Lassa Fever and Coronavirus,” Consultant Epidemiologist and Acting Head of the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, Dr Omosivie Maduka, recommended regular handwash with soap and running water, as well as personal hygiene, physical distancing, as some effective preventive measures against the virus. She also demonstrated the right ways of handwashing and wearing nose masks to minimise the spread of the pandemic. Dr Maduka described public health as the science and art of preventing diseases and promoting healthy lifestyle through medical and non-pharmaceutical practices.

Also speaking, Director of Public Health and Disease Control at the Rivers State Ministry of Health, Dr Golden Ow'honda, briefed the forum on the measures lined up by the Rivers State Government to combat Lassa Fever and Coronavirus. He also assured the public that the State

Government has put effective measures in place, including entry-point tracing, to handle the Coronavirus pandemic in the State.

On her part, Acting Director of the University's Health Services Department, Dr Chinwe Ezirim, stressed the importance of killing all rats at the residential and academic areas, disclosing that staff at the *O. B. Lulu Briggs Health Centre* had already taken appropriate measures to safeguard the campus from Lassa Fever. She also said that the Health Centre had provided sinks with soap at designated places, where staff and students can always wash their hands. The sensitisation forum which featured a plenary session moderated by Professor NUC LEAD Scholar, Professor Vincent Idemyor.

### **Members of the Organizing Committee**

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|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Dr Kingsley Patrick-Iwuanyanwu | Chairman  |
| 2. Dr (Mrs) Ojule                 | Member    |
| 3. Dr Francis Anacletus           | Member    |
| 4. Mr Williams Wodi               | Member    |
| 5. Dr Anthonet Ezejiofor          | Member    |
| 6. Dr Faith Diorgu                | Member    |
| 7. Dr Catherine Ikewuchi          | Member    |
| 8. Mr Confidence Igwe             | Secretary |

**PUTOR** wishes to express gratitude to the **University Management**, collaborating partners, other stakeholders and the **Steering Committee on Sexual Harassment** that organized these sensitization campaigns amongst the inhabitants of Rivers State.

We also wish to thank the **AAU** and the **World Bank** for their encouragement in the discharge of our statutory mandate in the advancement of public health and wellness in the West African sub-region and beyond.