

Controlling Non Communicable Diseases in Nigeria Through Health Library Outreach Projects

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Abstract:

Hypertension, heart attacks, stroke, kidney disease, and diabetes (types 2), some cancers and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are ravaging Nigerians daily. This project was aimed at curbing this rising burden of non-communicable diseases in Nigeria through accurate NCDs health information dissemination to the citizenry especially in rural communities.

The Health Library team carried out anti-NCD awareness campaigns in church locations, reaching thousands of worshippers every Sunday. The outreach increases their literacy level in this area and confidence to affect changes in lifestyle. It reduces their vulnerability to NCDs and empowers them to make informed lifestyle choices for healthy living for themselves, their families and the larger society.

Keywords: health information, non-communicable diseases, health library, health librarian, library outreach programme.

Introduction

Non communicable diseases (NCDs), including heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease, are collectively responsible for almost 70% of all deaths worldwide¹ Almost three quarters of all NCD deaths, and 82% of the 16 million people who died prematurely, or before reaching 70 years of age, occur in low- and middle-income countries. The rise of NCDs has been driven by primarily four major risk factors: tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets¹.

The burden of NCDs in Nigeria today is overwhelming. It is fast assuming a pandemic proportion. Many Nigerians from all cadre of the society are daily consumed by hypertension, respiratory diseases, diabetes, cancers and the attendant complications like stroke, heart attack, cardiac arrest, kidney disorders and blindness. We know many great Nigerian men and women whose lives had been wasted this way. It is interesting that while we shiver at the mere mention of HIV/AIDS, Ebola or laser fever diseases, though highly infectious, most Nigerians are not usually exposed to these communicable diseases. On the other hand, hypertension, stroke, chronic respiratory disease, cancers, and diabetes and kidney diseases have permeated and are part of most households in Nigeria. As a result many children had been orphaned, with poverty and hunger enthroned due to the loss of their breadwinners. Family members also spend time and huge resources annually taking care of their loved ones suffering from these chronic diseases, while many of the affected ones suffer extreme pains, dejection, degeneration, desperation, misery, agony, disability, and then premature and needless deaths. Practically all Nigerians are directly or indirectly affected by these non-communicable diseases.

In the same vein, our governments lose millions of work-hours and money yearly to absenteeism of sick and unproductive employees, paying wages for work undone. Non-communicable diseases overstretch health facilities and personnel in both public and private hospitals as they now dominate healthcare needs. They impede and sabotage poverty alleviation programmes, and make sluggish the attainment of national and international developmental programmes and targets like the Sustainable Development Goals. Equally, the NCDs contribute greatly to premature deaths and the appalling low rate of life expectancy in Nigeria which is now about 54.5 years².

Happily, non-communicable diseases are not death sentences. According to World Health Organisation, NCDs can be prevented and managed. In May 2013 the World Health Assembly endorsed WHO's Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020. The global action plan has six objectives whose implementation at country level will support the attainment of the nine NCD targets by 2025, as well as facilitate the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-being⁴. Part of this plan is raising awareness through mass media campaigns which is what the library outreach programme is all about. This project was aimed at curbing this rising burden of non-communicable diseases in Nigeria through accurate NCDs health information dissemination to the citizenry especially in rural communities.

Methodology

Projects started with advocacy visits to church management. The hazards of NCDs and the need for immediate massive intervention were discussed. Priests were generally very understanding and sensitive on issues of parishioners' health and did not hesitate to give dates for the projects. Projects were normally fixed on Sundays during morning service/mass. Notices for the programmes were publicised through routine oral announcements and church bulletins weeks preceding the visits. After Holy Communion, 15 to 20 minutes were given to the research team to address the congregation, while the very comprehensive version including question and answer follow immediately after the service in church halls. In the halls, ample demonstrations were made. For examples, necessary daily physical exercises were demonstrated and the congregation required to practice and repeat at the instance. Emphases was heavily on modifiable behavioural risk factors such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol. Cost-effective strategies for reducing these risk factors along with other basic tips on healthy living primarily for the

prevention of NCDs were explained in the local language. These were followed by question and answer sessions and then the distribution, Education Communication (IEC) material and health checks (where applicable). The IEC material, a 48-page booklet was compiled from library medical literature and written in simple and plain language. The anti NCDs campaign started in 2011 and is still ongoing. Forty-seven projects were carried out between January 2016 and October 2017, the period under review.

Collaboration

Medical doctors and nurses were usually involved in the projects as the need arose. They joined the team to project locations and conducted body mass index (BMI) measurements, blood pressure and sugar levels checks and gave treatment and advice based on the checks' results.

Findings

Nigerians, especially the rural dwellers, are in dire need of accurate information on non-communicable diseases. Giving them evidence-based NCDs health information increases their literacy level in this area and their confidence to affect changes in lifestyle. It reduces their vulnerability to NCDs as it empowers them to make informed lifestyle choices for healthy living for themselves, their families and the larger society. Efforts by government in Nigeria at implementing WHO's recommendations in terms of policy and action for the prevention and control of NCDs are however at a very low ebb.

Evaluation

Indications of the positive effect of librarians' NCDs health outreach program are enormous. Starting from the venue of the projects, the fervent interest and enthusiasm of the audience seemed tangible. They maintained dead silence as they listened to the research teams in the churches. Attempts by officials to take the microphone at the expiration of our time attracted thunderous shouts of "no, no, no, allow her to go on, we need it" They sat tight while the talk lasted in spite of the fact that congregations are notorious for being in hurry to leave even before the end of the service. Sometimes some health professionals among the congregations or enlightened Priests collaborated the NCDs facts. The number of questions entertained during the question and answer sessions were incredible. Their instant expression of gratitude and praises for "our coming with valuable but rare information they so much need" were overwhelming. Many times the researchers left the venue way into the afternoon, in a bid to satisfy the thirst for standard health information. And the audience always pleaded for a repeat visit.

After each visit, the researcher (librarian) was inundated by telephone calls and text messages from community members asking questions arising from the practices of the lifestyle changes. Unknown faces often come forward with great praises, comments and testimonies of the positive impact of the teachings in their lives anywhere the librarian was spotted in the public. Here are some among the many recorded testimonies:

One lady called on St Valentine's Day and in an emotion-laden voice said:

"You are my Val, you are my Val. You may not know me, but I know you. I am a teacher. You came to my church two Sundays ago. Okili nmgbawa isi (acute migraine) runs in my family. It killed my parents and some of my siblings. Only two

of us are living, myself and my brother and we are still battling with this terrible migraine waiting to take our last breath. I don't sleep, pains and discomfort all day. After your visit, I dedicatedly practiced everything especially early morning routine of drinking water, deep breathing and rope skipping etc. Few days after for the first time in years I started having long and deep night sleeps, the headaches and migraine vanished, there was peace in my entire body. It was most unbelievable. I contacted my only surviving brother at once. Now I go round the community with your booklet giving others the same healthy living teaching. God bless you my sister". Ngozi Ukpai (2016).

"You came to my church St Patrick's last year. I am very agile now. I do my exercise regularly and practice other things. I feel good all the time. Please I want to know if it is good to use coconut oil as cream?" Ngozi Nwobu St Patricks Catholic Church, Awka (2018).

"I was at St James Amichi during your health program. I try most of the things you taught. I have lost my weight, am no more on drugs and I feel happy, God keep you for me" Augusta Emegwalu.(2018)

"Ma, my name is Ikechukwu Ibe. I phoned to congratulate and appreciate you and your wonderful health programme. It touches me deeply that such a priceless programme is free. Before now, I used to take drugs on daily basis like food, I mean it's been from one drug to another including traditional medicine yet I felt bad most times. After listening to you and reading the booklet my life changed. Exercise, water and fruits are now part of my life. It really helped me". Ikechukwu Ibe, St Michael Catholic Church, Nnewi. 2016.

"I enjoyed your health talk. I loved it. I enjoy practicing it all. It's been wonderful, great, I feel better generally. I start my day with a litre of water and take breakfast as a point of duty. No night food again and sometimes I skip it completely. It has been very helpful. I now walk a lot and fruits are basic. I lost weight and then stabilized, no more adding. I do my health checks often and they have been stable and fine. I feel great. Please keep the great work on, lives are being saved" Barr. Chizoba Nnagboh, St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, Awka (2018)

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References

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Appendix 1: Project Locations (January 17th 2016 - October 29th 2017).

S/N	Church & Location	Date	Time	Priest
1	St. Marks Catholic Nnewichi, Nnewi	17/1/16		
2	St. Andrew's Anglican Church (DCC) Nnewi	14/2/16	6.30am	Ven. Emeribe
3	St. Paul's Anglican Church Abubo, Nnewichi	14/2/16	6.30am	Rev. Emma Nnodu
4	St. Andrew's Anglican Church Awuda-Nnobi	21/2/16	7am	Rev. Izu Ndubuisi
5	St. Stephens Anglican Church Uru-Umudim	28/2/16	9.30am	
6	(repeat visit) St. Michael's Catholic Church Umudim, Nnewi (Parish)	6/3/16	5.45am 8am 10am	Monsignor Patrick Ezeobata
7	Outstations: St. Simon – Umudimkwa Umudim Nnewi	6/3/16	5.45am	
8	St. Thomas Uru- Umudim Nnewi	6/3/16	5.45am	
9	Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church, Nnewi	13/03/16	5.45am 8am 10am	Rev. Fr. Morris Okeke
10	St. Mary's Catholic Church Abubor-Nnewichi Nnewi	13/03/16	4pm	Rev. Fr. Ephraim Madu
11	St. Thomas Anglican Church, Otolu-Nnewi	20/3/16	6.15am 9.30am	Ven. Vin Egwuenu
12	St. Stephen's Anglican Church Nnokwa	10/4/16	8am	
13	St. Paul's Anglican Church, Nnobi	17/4/16	4pm	Rev. Chukwueme
14	St. Michael's Catholic Church, Umudim	24/4/16	5.45am 8am 10am 4.30pm	Monsignor Patrick Ezeobata
15	St. Gabriel's Pastoral Center, Ozubulu (Retreat for Priests only)	26/4/16	12-1.40pm	Hosted by His Lordship, Bishop Hilary Okeke
16	St. Philip's Anglican Church Ndingbu, Nnewi	01/05/16	9am	Rev. Canon Temple Madunagu
17	St. Mary's Catholic Church, Nnokwa	15/05/16	6am 10am	Rev. Fr. Vincent Ezenwaka
18	Outstation: Nnaku Village		7am	
19	St. Philip's Catholic Church-Okpunoeze Nnewi	22/5/16	5.45am 8am 10am	Rev. Fr. Felix Nwagbo
20	St. Edward's Catholic Church, Amawbia	29/5/16	6am 9.15am	Rev. Fr. Okechukwu Joel
21	Men's Conference St. Stephen's – Nnokwa	4/6/16	1-2pm	
22	Holy Trinity Catholic, Church 100ft Road, Nnewi	12/6/16	5.45am 8.30am 4pm	Rev. Fr. Umeh
23	St. Peter's Clavers Nnewichi Nnewi	19/6/16	5.30am 8am 10am	Rev. Fr. Nwagbala
24	St. Jude's Catholic Church, Nnewi	03/07/16	5.45am 8am 10am	Rev. Fr. Ernest Ebulue
25	St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Enugwukwu Outstation:	17/7/16	6am 9am	Rev. Fr. Joseph Obianuo

26	St. Marks Awovu	17/7/16	6am	
27	St. James Catholic, Church Amichi Outstation: St. Hilary Iseke	24/7/16	6am 9am 6.30am	Rev Fr Linus Iloegesi
28	Our Lady Queen of Heaven, Amichi	14/8/16	6am 9.30am	Rev, Fr, Augustine Ndukaji
29	St. George Catholic Church, Oraifite	28/8/16	6am 9am	Rev Fr. Gabriel Ugwunwangwu
30	St. Patrick's Catholic Cathedral, Awka	4/9/16	7.30am 10am	Rev. Fr. Chukwuma
31	St. John Apostle & Evangelist Catholic Church, Awka	11/9/16	6am 9.30am	
32	St. Christopher's Anglican Church, Otolo-Nnewi	18/9/16	6am 9am	
33	St. Anthony's Catholic Church Ifite, Awka	25/9/16	5.45am 7am 8am 9.30am	Rev. Fr. Ogbuagu
34	Annunciation Catholic Church, Awka	2/10/16	6am 7.15am 8.30am	Rev. Fr. Ezeobi QH
35	St. Thomas Aquinas, Awka	16/10/16	6am 8am 9.30am	Rev. K.O. Ibeh
36	St. Charles Catholic Church, Obiofia, Nnewi	23/10/16	5.30am 8am	Rev. Fr. D. Anosike
37	St. Raphael Akwu- Obiofia		8am	
38	St. Francis of Assisi, Awka	27/11/16	6am 8.30am	Rev. Fr. Ubah
39	All Saints Catholic Church, Okpunoegbu Nnewi	11/12/16	5.45am 8am 9.30am	Rev. Fr. Anselem Onwuegbuchulam
40	Anglican Women Conference: St. Paul's Anglican Church Umuenem Nnewi	22/4/17	1-2.20pm	
41	SS Peter & Paul Parish, Awka	03/9/17	6am 9am	Monsignor Muojekwu
42	St. Mary's Catholic, Church, Ukporkor	8/10/17	6am	Rev. Fr. Obele
43	St. Theresa' Agboani Village	8/10/17	8am	
44	St. Vincent – Nzegha Village	8/10/17	10am	
45	St. John's Catholic Church, Neni	15/10/17	6am 9am	Rev. Fr. Charles Umeorji
46	St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Nibo	22/10/17	6am 7am	Rev. Fr. Paulinus-Marie Okafor
47	St. Andrew's Catholic Church, Adazi	29/10/17	6am 9am	

Appendix 2: Photographs



The researcher addressing the congregation during morning mass at St Mary's Catholic church, Ukpok on 18/10.17.



Addressing the congregation inside St Mary's Catholic Church Ukpok during morning mass on 8/10/17.



Addressing the congregation inside St Mary's Catholic Church Ukpor during morning mass on Sunday 8/10/17.



Interactive session with the congregation in front of the grotto after the morning mass on Sunday 8/10/17.



The Librarian demonstrating simple physical exercises to the congregation at St Mary's Catholic Church Ukpor after addressing them inside the church on 8/10/17.



Interactive session with the congregation in front of the grotto after the morning mass at St Mary's Catholic Church. Ukpor on Sunday 8/10/17.