

# Editorial

## Non-communicable diseases are reaching epidemic proportions: evidence from low and middle income countries

In this September 2013 issue of *African Health Sciences* we bring you diverse papers with one running theme: communicable diseases. They cover a wide range of topics: from 'making plantains safe' for renal patients to sexuality for people surviving stroke.

Hence Eluwa et al<sup>1</sup> report on the effect of diet soda drinks on the histology of the cerebellum, while Uganda researchers report on the effect of soaking plantain (*matooke*) to reduce its potassium content to make it safe for kidney disease patients.<sup>2</sup> This is followed by biochemistry papers including one on inhibition of glucuronosyltransferase,<sup>3</sup> bile acid metabolism<sup>4</sup>, the role of angiocidin in cell proliferation<sup>5</sup>, and paraoxonase and lipid hydroperoxide after football tournaments.<sup>6</sup>

The next group of papers is on cardiovascular issues. Hence we have a randomized controlled trial on the effect of interval training on pulse pressure in the management of hypertension.<sup>7</sup> Patient related factors for optimal blood pressure control,<sup>8</sup> and a non invasive test for left atrial thrombi in patients with mitral stenosis,<sup>9</sup> are described. Others include the use of platelet volume in diagnosis of supra-ventricular tachycardia<sup>10</sup>; gender specific left ventricular adaptation to hypertension and obesity in a tertiary health facility in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> The section ends with two papers: serum zinc values in children with congenital heart disease<sup>12</sup>; and congenital heart diseases in children with pneumonia.<sup>13</sup>

The next set of papers is related to neurology. Duggan describes epilepsy and its effects on children and families in rural Uganda<sup>14</sup>; while Nigerian workers report on psychiatric morbidity in stroke patients attending a neurology clinic<sup>15</sup>. Keeping with the theme on stroke, we have included papers on: the quality of life amongst young adults with stroke living in Kenya<sup>16</sup>; sexual dysfunctions in stroke survivors<sup>17</sup>; and factors associated with functional outcome of stroke patients after rehabilitation<sup>18</sup>.

Diabetes mellitus (DM): we have several papers on insulin resistance<sup>19</sup>; prednisolone induced DM<sup>20</sup>, foot ulcers and asymptomatic bacteriuria.<sup>21</sup> One paper reports on effects of weight reduction on liver function and insulin resistance in DM with

non-alcoholic fatty Liver.<sup>22</sup> We conclude with effects of traditional Chinese medicine on type II DM induced by high-fat diet and streptozotocin.<sup>23</sup>

Allergy remains a big issue in African countries. Hence we have a report on the impact of weight loss on markers of inflammation in obese children with asthma.<sup>24</sup> A hospital based study on garlic and onion sensitization<sup>25</sup>; and quality of life in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease<sup>26</sup> ends the section..

A treatise on non communicable disease is incomplete without consideration of cancer. Contributions include: prognostic value of glypican-3 in alpha fetoprotein negative hepatocellular carcinoma patients<sup>27</sup>; immunohistochemical expression of EBV latent membrane protein and p53 in nasopharyngeal carcinoma<sup>28</sup>. Others are on environmental exposure to carcinogens in Cameroon,<sup>29</sup> and chronic inflammatory cells and damaged limbal basal epithelial cells in pterygium.<sup>30</sup> The section on surgery and the GIT includes several interesting papers on factors affecting mortality of critical care trauma patients<sup>31</sup>; sarcoma of small bowel mesentery simulating hyper immune splenomegaly syndrome<sup>32</sup>; and upper GI bleeding among neonates<sup>33</sup>. There are more papers on use of a drain after thyroid surgery<sup>34</sup>; effect of bupivacaine on pulmonary function after elective lower abdominal operations<sup>35</sup>; camel related pancreatico-duodenal injuries<sup>36</sup>; and postoperative pain in the first 48 hours.<sup>37</sup>

Finally we have a section on substance abuse and the health system including: alcohol and substance use among adolescents in Ibadan,<sup>38</sup> smokeless tobacco and tooth loss<sup>39</sup>; and substance use correlates of relapse among patients treated for addiction.<sup>40</sup>

Results of an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Zambian health worker retention scheme (ZHWRS) for rural areas<sup>41</sup>; teaching methods preferred by medical students<sup>42</sup>, factors influencing the choice of surgery as a career by pre-registration interns<sup>43</sup>, are reported. Patients' perceived reactions to medical errors<sup>44</sup>, and returns from globalization to woman smallholder coffee and food producers in rural Uganda,<sup>45</sup> ends this section.

Finally we have case reports on medication errors in anesthetic practice<sup>46</sup>; vitamin B12 deficiency presenting with acute confusion<sup>47</sup>; and cases of jaundice with thyrotoxicosis.<sup>48</sup>

It is high time communicable diseases received the attention they deserve in the context of infections and dysfunctional health systems in LMICs.

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