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 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. This is followed by biochemistry papers including one on inhibition of glucuronosyltransferase, bile acid metabolism, the role of angioedem in cell proliferation, and paraoxonase and lipid hydroperoxide after football tournaments.

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. Patient related factors for optimal blood pressure control, and a non invasive test for left atrial thrombi in patients with mitral stenosis, are described. Others include the use of platelet volume in diagnosis of supra-ventricular tachycardia; gender specific left ventricular adaptation to hypertension and obesity in a tertiary health facility in Nigeria. The section ends with two papers: serum zinc values in children with congenital heart disease; and congenital heart diseases in children with pneumonia.

The next set of papers is related to neurology. Duggan describes epilepsy and its effects on children and families in rural Uganda; while Nigerian workers report on psychiatric morbidity in stroke patients attending a neurology clinic.

Keeping with the theme on stroke, we have included papers on: the quality of life amongst young adults with stroke living in Kenya; sexual dysfunctions in stroke survivors; and factors associated with functional outcome of stroke patients after rehabilitation.

Diabetes mellitus (DM): we have several papers on insulin resistance; prednisolone induced DM, foot ulcers and asymptomatic bacteriuria.

One paper reports on effects of weight reduction on liver function and insulin resistance in DM with non-alcoholic fatty Liver. We conclude with effects of traditional Chinese medicine on type II DM induced by high-fat diet and streptozotocin.

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. A hospital based study on garlic and onion sensitization; and quality of life in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease 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; immunohistochemical expression of EBV latent membrane protein and p53 in nasopharyngeal carcinoma. Others are on environmental exposure to carcinogens in Cameroon, and chronic inflammatory cells and damaged basal epithelial cells in pterygium.

The section on surgery and the GIT includes several interesting papers on factors affecting mortality of critical care trauma patients; sarcoma of small bowel mesentery simulating hyper immune splenomegaly syndrome; and upper G1 bleeding among neonates. There are more papers on use of a drain after thyroid surgery; effect of bupivacaine on pulmonary function after elective lower abdominal operations; camel related panceatico-duodenal injuries; and postoperative pain in the first 48 hours.

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

Results of an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Zambian health worker retention scheme (ZHWRS) for rural areas; teaching methods preferred by medical students, factors influencing the choice of surgery as a career by pre-registration interns, are reported. Patients’ perceived reactions to medical errors, and returns from globalization to woman smallholder coffee and food producers in rural Uganda, ends this section.
Finally we have case reports on medication errors in anesthetic practice\(^1\); vitamin B12 deficiency presenting with acute confusion\(^2\); and cases of jaundice with thyrotoxicosis.\(^3\)

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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