The role of a connect center in public engagement during the 2018 lassa fever outbreak in Nigeria

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Does sugarcane cure Lassa fever?

What is the relationship between Lassa fever, Rats and Sugar Cane?
Anxiety over students major snack

Stop drinking garri, Okorocha warns as death toll rises

Reference
The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) operates a Connect Centre which serves as a multi-platform hub for public engagement, response to inquiries, complaints and feedback.
Communication flow of the connect Centre

Pubic Engagement

Rumour Logging

IDSR Monitoring

AMCS Supervision

**IDSR:** Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response

**AMCS:** Antimicrobial Consumption Surveillance
Role of the connect center during an outbreak

Pubic Engagement

Rumour Logging

Connect Centre

Risk Communication

Surveillance
Objective

This study looks at the role of the connect center during the Lassa fever outbreak between January and April 2018 and how it enhanced the surveillance pillar to quickly identify new cases across the country.
The CC-Code

- **Inquiries**: Questions, calls and texts that are received from the public domain.
- **Rumor**: An unverified information received in the connect center.
- **Verified**: Information/rumor which has been investigated by the NCDC surveillance team and confirmed to be true.
Engagement flow in the connect centre

Public/Community → 1st Responders (Connect Centre) → 2nd Responders (NCDC Surveillance team) → 3rd Responders (NCDC Directors)

Step 1 (Contact Details): Person, Place, Time of Event

Step II (Categorize): Complaints, Rumours, Enquiries

Step III (Troubleshoot): Resolve, Assign, Close Case

Risk Assessment

Feedback

Escalate
The flow (in clear terms)

As part of the national risk communication strategy for Lassa fever, the public was advised to reach out to the NCDC through SMS, voice calls or WhatsApp.

This elicited Daily calls, SMS and WhatsApp chats initiated by the public during the review period on Lassa fever.

Categorization of messages into query, rumors and surveillance reports as shared by the public was done.

Data analysis using Microsoft Excel was done to determine location of informants and validation of information received.

Feedback for inquiries and rumors were also analyzed to evaluate the feedback system of information of the connect center.
States with high number of Queries for Lassa fever between Jan-April 2018
Number of queries, rumors and verified rumors by state during the Lassa fever outbreak between Jan-Apr 2018
Results

The Connect Centre received 103 Lassa fever queries, of which 23 (22.3%) were escalated and responded to by an authorized officer of the NCDC. Out of the 28 rumors reported, 22% were escalated for verification.

All States shared surveillance information on reported cases (suspected or confirmed) of Lassa fever with the Connect center. The State with the highest number of information received was Ondo and the lowest was Lagos.
Conclusion

It served as a useful tool in information gathering and feedback to the public

Information received through this center impacted response activities and improved communication with the public during the outbreak
Recommendations

- Public health institutions should partner with telecommunication firms/stakeholders to reduce the costs of information dissemination. In the NCDC situation, there is a toll free line that is available 24/7hrs.

- Public health institutions should ensure to have a “Connect Centre” to support the surveillance pillar during outbreaks.
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