

NMA/AGSM/2022/BCS/008 - COVID-19 and Other Infectious Disease Outbreaks: The Way Forward for the Chemical Pathology Laboratory in the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: COVID-19 the most recent pandemic took the world by surprise as compared with the Ebola epidemic and Lassa fever endemic in Nigeria. The aim of this study was to establish the adaptive changes made by the Department of Chemical pathology at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH) and how prepared it is for future highly infectious disease outbreaks.

Methodology: A questionnaire was sent out to all medical doctors and medical laboratory scientists in the department.

Result: Forty-two percent of respondents feel comfortable working with a specimen from highly infectious disease patients. Half of the respondents feel laboratory practice has changed evidenced by more frequent hand washing, touching faces less often, and having sanitizers and facemasks handy. Though 84% of respondents feel they had COVID-19 at one point, less than 30% confirmed it. Forty-two percent are immunized against COVID-19. This is commendable compared with 12.3% of the Nigerian Population that is fully vaccinated. All pathologists agree that the department has a great role to play in outbreaks including prognosticating and monitoring treatment. However, just 43% were aware of CURB-65 as an assessment for disease severity in pneumonia. Most were not aware of A-DROP and 4C Mortality which uses urea a basic biochemical analyte to assess the severity and outcome of COVID-19 disease.

Conclusion: In a resource-poor society, the department adapted well and there is room for improvement as there is no laid down response protocol. The laboratory staff needs regular education and the provision of a continuous supply of basic amenities. A fully equipped area for highly infectious specimens needs to be established.

Keywords: COVID-19, Infectious Disease Outbreak, Laboratory Response, Chemical Pathology.

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How to cite this article: Otokunefor O, Owamagbe E. COVID-19, and Other Infectious Disease Outbreaks: The Way Forward for the Chemical Pathology Laboratory in the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Niger Med J 2023;64(1):127.

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