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Community engagement during the Ebola vaccine trial in Guinea

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The Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa was by far the largest in history. The vaccine trial was set in the context of no known effective medication or vaccine against the virus, community pains, anguish and helplessness with attendant suspicion and hostility. Thus it was crucial before the onset of the trial to develop an efficient community engagement strategy in order to earn community confidence. Besides, since there were a lot of players in the fight against Ebola virus, it was crucial that this plan be collaborative and complimentary with what other people were doing, without undermining good clinical practice principle. Diagnostic social anthropologists' visits were done and community leaders were consulted. Two crucial findings were made: It was clear that there will be no one size fit all plan and that each community will require locality specific effort and even at that such plan could change with time due to the volatile nature of community perception. More importantly, the use of people from the study communities to front the engagement was a very important discovery earlier in the study. There were various levels of engagement: National, prefectoral, sub-prefectoral, sectoral and family. Keen sense of cultural and religious sensitivity and patience was important in order to achieve the goal of the study. Strategic efforts to douse the effect of rumors, avoid stigmatization, care of sick study participants and genuine interest if someone dies were important key elements of community engagement. With the publication of the preliminary result of the trial, showing 100% rVSV-ZEBOV vaccine efficacy and more than 90% completion of follow up visits, the engagement plan employed during the trial has significantly been successful.

Biography

Godwin Enwere has completed his MD from University of Nigeria, MSc in Epidemiology from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and he is a Fellow of West African College of Physicians (Pediatrics). He has worked as a Clinical Trials Specialist for Ebola Vaccine Trial in Guinea, Medical Director of Meningitis Vaccine Project and Clinical Coordinator in the phase III trial of 9-valent Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine in The Gambia. He has published more than 40 papers in peer review journals.

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