

Towards head and neck cancer prevention in Nigeria: Insights from the CHANCE Programme

Kehinde K. Kanmodi¹, Omotayo F. Fagbule¹

AFFILIATION

¹ Campaign for Head and Neck Cancer Education (CHANCE) Program, Cephas Health Research Initiative Inc, Ibadan, Nigeria

CORRESPONDENCE TO

Kehinde K. Kanmodi. Campaign for Head and Neck Cancer Education (CHANCE) Program, Cephas Health Research Initiative Inc, Ibadan, Nigeria. E-mail: kanmodikehinde@yahoo.com

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Dear Editor,

Head and neck cancer (HNC) is a leading cause of cancer-related deaths, globally. Every year, about 55000 new cases and 300000 deaths of HNC, are reported globally¹. Similarly, the burden of HNC in Nigeria is also enormous, being a leading cause of cancer-related deaths among Nigerians². In order to combat the enormous burden of HNC in Nigeria, through primary prevention of the disease, an intervention programme named 'Campaign for Head and Neck Cancer Education (CHANCE) Programme' was established in 2016 by a group of dentists in Nigeria³. Through this programme, multiple research projects and piloted public health education programmes on HNC have been conducted⁴⁻⁹.

The primary rationales for launching the CHANCE Programme were to address: 1) the high prevalence rates of the HNC major risk factors (oral sex, tobacco use, and alcohol drinking) among Nigerian youth⁷; 2) the huge burden of HNC disease in Nigeria²; and 3) the dearth of scientific literature on public health aspects of HNC disease in Nigeria.

So far, the CHANCE Programme has been run for 3 years and some months, and some specific lessons of public health relevance have been learnt from the programme^{1,4-9}. We were able to identify that: 1) many Nigerians are not aware of HNC disease⁴⁻⁸; 2) many Nigerians that claimed to be aware of HNC disease actually lacked adequate knowledge about its risk factors, symptoms, and treatment⁴⁻⁷; 3) many Nigerians are willing to know more about HNC disease^{4,5,7}; 4) school-based HNC programmes are well accepted by youth in the school communities^{5,7}; 5) Nigerian in-school youth are willing to voluntarily play the role of HNC prevention advocates by teaching others about HNC^{5,7}; and 6) school-based HNC education programmes can be implemented at minimal financial cost through planned involvement of in-school adolescents as HNC prevention advocates^{5,7}.

The above factors are good social indicators showing that many Nigerian school communities are willing to get

engaged in HNC prevention programmes; and through this engagement, much can be achieved in regard to HNC prevention in Nigeria.

Based on the above, it is highly recommended that the Nigeria government at all levels (federal, state, and local) should formulate and implement policies that will drive the establishment of oral health promotion programmes in Nigeria secondary schools. Through these, massive school-based HNC education interventions can be successfully implemented.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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