

Assessment of challenges healthcare providers face when communicating delayed laboratory results to patients managed for Lassa fever in Benue State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Providing results to individuals diagnosed with Lassa fever is an ethical obligation that enhances patients' confidence and commitment to their treatment. It also fosters trust in the community regarding management practices, improves treatment outcomes, and strengthens responses to outbreaks. However, fulfilling this obligation can be complex, particularly when some patients and their families perceive the results negatively. This study examined healthcare providers' experiences with the challenges they encounter when communicating delayed positive results to suspected Lassa fever patients admitted to the Benue State University Teaching Hospital (BSUTH) in Makurdi, Nigeria.

Methods

A cross-sectional descriptive study and Key informant interviews were conducted to gather insights from 15 healthcare providers at a Lassa fever treatment center, BSUTH Makurdi, between January and December 2024. This period was marked by active surveillance of the disease and a

significant increase in the number of patients treated. The healthcare providers shared their experiences and stories, which were organized and presented in narrative form.

Results

The patient's duration of admission ranges from 1 to 25 days, with an average of 8 (± 3.5) days. The average turnaround time from blood sample collection to testing and result release was 6 (± 2) days. The challenges faced by the healthcare providers included a lack of trust in the results, patients' denial of diagnoses, failure to provide detailed information about contacts, emotional blackmail, mistrust, ethical dilemmas, physical assaults, and emotional abuses, which are obstacles to maintaining ongoing surveillance.

Conclusion

The increased time to process specimens and the delayed communication of results for Lassa fever diagnosis have a significant negative impact on healthcare providers. These further create notable

gaps in the surveillance and referral pathways for managing clinical cases. Therefore, it is essential to establish molecular laboratories at all treatment centers to ensure a quick turnaround for results.