

A governance model for Lassa fever and emerging infectious diseases: The Irrua Institute Initiative

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Introduction

The Institute of Lassa fever Research and Control (now renamed as Institute of Viral and Emergent Pathogens Control and Research -IVEPCR) is in Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, Nigeria. It was established in 2007 as an indigenous initiative of the hospital management in response to the epidemic of Lassa fever (LF) in the area. At the commencement of operation, mortality from cases of LF ranged from 60 -80%. There was a dearth of Diagnostic and case management capabilities.

Methods

For administration, a director and secretary were appointed to man the various divisions created. The divisions were Training, Diagnostic and Research Laboratory, Case management, Community outreach, Data management, Information/media and administration/secretariat. The Institute related with stakeholders and forms partnerships at the community, Local government area, State, National and International levels. The hospital ethics committee ensured compliance with GCP in all research studies. The Irrua study group, made up of local and international partners, coordinated all research studies, ensured compliance with GCP, including signing of MOUs.

Results

Capacity in molecular diagnostics was built over time, with 50 laboratory personnel able to run RT-PCR diagnostics. Apart from LF, diagnostics capability has been built on other emergent infectious diseases such as Ebola, Covid-19, Dengue and mpox. Case management is conducted by trained physicians, including the capability in hemodialysis. Mortality reduced from 60 -80% at the inception of the institute to 10 -15% in 2024/2025. The institute is presently a training hub in diagnostics, case management and research for physicians from across the nation.

Conclusion

From the setup of a simple governance structure at inception 17years ago, the Institute has evolved to a level able to manage and respond to outbreaks of LF and other EIDs with little or no support from external partners.