

Promoting healthy habits for disease prevention

Two papers in the current issue of the journal focus on healthy habits namely: hand washing and wearing shoes. Hand washing is a cheap and effective means of preventing diseases that are contacted through faeco-oral route and person-to-person contact. Hand-washing combined with other public health measures curtailed the Ebola Virus Disease that ravaged parts of Africa between 2013 and 2015.

The paper by Ojo et al was based on the findings from a questionnaire survey on hand washing practices of 345 non-medical, undergraduate students. The authors found that over 80% of the students practiced hand washing which was quite impressive. However, what was worrisome was that only about half of them did so the standard way, and would seem to echo the saying that “not all that can be counted count” with regards to effective hand washing for disease prevention. The lesson to be learnt is that hand-washing is essential for disease prevention, but perhaps more importantly; it must be done in a standard way to be effective and the World Health Organization recommended protocol for hand washing should be taught and adhered to. Replication of the hand-washing study among food handlers and health care workers would determine the extent of compliance with standard practice amongst those who should know.

The paper by Umezurike and others reported that pregnant women who wore shoes were two times less likely to develop soil-transmitted, helminthic infection. They studied 326 women and found a prevalence of stool transmitted helminthes infection of about 14% with *Ascaris lumbricoides* predominating. Walking bare footed appeared to facilitate helminthic infection spread by increasing exposure to the eggs and larvae in the soil. Wearing shoes protects from other conditions as well and the appropriate use of anti-helminthic therapy is indicated.

These studies have reawakened our interest in basic public health measures for combating communicable diseases. They are cheap yet very effective and awareness is key. Innovative methods for information dissemination for habit change are needed. Prevention is always better than cure.

A. Ogunniyi

Editor-in-Chief