



The Health promotion training in Enugu

Enugu SHCG Influences Policy Review on Health Information

“Why suffer in silence? Are you suffering from staphylococcus, gonorrhoea, syphilis, pile, weak erection, infertility, pain, dirty and irregular menstruation, low sperm count, ulcer, pelvic inflammatory disease, stroke, fibroid, urinary tract infection, cancer, eye problem, chest pain, hypertension, arthritis & rheumatism, diabetes, e.t.c? Come to XYZ Medical Institute. Our equipments would diagnose the problem and our doctors would prescribe herbs such that you would notice a difference in 2 weeks. Our NA FDAC number is 123.”

Messages like these will soon be a thing of the past as the monitoring and vetting of all health information disseminated through the Enugu State media will be one of the priority issues to be addressed by the State Ministry of Health (SMOH) at the upcoming review of the Enugu State health policies. This is as a result of recommendations provided to the health ministry by the Enugu State Health Communications Group (SHCG) following an intensive assessment of health communications in the past six months in the state.

The SHCG is an independent advisory group, established and coordinated by the health ministry with support from PATHS2 as part of its systems strengthening efforts. The group has the mandate to provide the much needed technical guidance in coordinating and harmonizing health communications in the state to help

move the State Ministry of Health from health education to health promotion.

The SHCG has representations from the private media houses, government-owned media, independent producers, the academia, line ministries, community based organizations and the State Ministry of Health. After the SHCG inauguration, members were trained by PATHS2 on the rudiments and essence of effective health promotion and communications to equip them with capacity for their mandate.

The knowledge acquired from the training was used to embark on their first activity which was the review and assessment of all health communications in the state in the past six months.

This review considered among other things the role of SMOH in health



An Enugu SHCG session

communications in the state, accuracy and regulation of health information, coordination among different health promotion programmes and donors, roles of the media, roles of line ministries and CSOs in health promotion, gender and social inclusiveness and rural-urban consideration in targeting audiences.

On the accuracy and regulation of health information, the review

highlighted that the Enugu SMOH is presently not involved in the vetting of the content of health media materials especially those from the traditional medicine vendors while the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) which is the regulatory body for media houses does not have jurisdiction over traditional medicine.

"We recognize the harm these wrong herbal medicine messages are doing to the people and we are equally worried but there is no existing policy that enables SMOH to regulate the type of poster, handbills and radio/T.V messages that goes out to the public" says the Director of Public Health, Enugu SMOH, Dr Chukwuma Igweagu.

In the same vein, Dr Osa-Eloka Ekwueme, Consultant, University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu says the situation is further complicated by claims that such medicine is approved by government. His words, "The belief that herbal medicine is wholly natural and cannot be overdosed is the main attraction and hearing that it is approved by NAFDAC is like telling people to go ahead to buy and use them."

Enugu SHCG discovered that many of the advertised herbal drugs claim to have approval from NAFDAC and so are gaining more patronage from people in every strata of the society.

National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), however, explains what approval by

the body was supposed to mean. According to Mr. Ekpo, the NAFDAC Zonal Inspector, Enugu state, "the NAFDAC numbers given to herbal products are only to show that it is non toxic and fit for human consumption but its efficacy they do not guarantee. There must be a message boldly written on all herbal products saying that the efficacy of the drug is not guaranteed by NAFDAC and this message should also accompany all herbal drugs placed on adverts."

The health ministry must take leadership role in engaging with the relevant agencies, MDAs, media and other relevant partner in the state to regulate advertorials, jingles and other messages with spurious claims in order to safeguard the health of the people – excerpts from the review report

After assessing the prevailing situation, the SHCG recommended the inclusion of a monitoring & regulation of health information clause in the upcoming review of the Enugu state health policies. The Enugu SMOH will also be spearheading a platform for synergizing the activities of the government/private media houses, the ministries of Health and Information, Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and NAFDAC to ensure that citizens are properly informed on health issues.

Presently, the SMOH is planning to set up a meeting between NAFDAC, National Broadcasting Corporation



Martina Onoh,
Assistant Director of
Programmes,
Nigerian Television
Authority (NTA) and
member, Enugu
SHCG

"Through the review, I was shocked to learn that these drugs are supposed to have a disclaimer saying that NAFDAC does not say its cure claim is true, yet the vendors imply that it works because it has a NAFDAC number! Also, I was not aware that NAFDAC gives Advert permits to the vendors to present to media houses to guide them on the levels of advertisement the products can go. Now I know better what to demand for every adverts and programmes."

(NBC), Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Enugu State Broadcasting Corporation (ESBC), and traditional medicine practitioners to discuss and find a common ground for regulating health messages especially in enforcing the advert permit of NAFDAC.

Improving the capacity of citizens to make informed choices for priority health issues through appropriate health information regulation would go a long way in helping Enugu State deliver on the Millennium Development Goals 4, 5 and 6.

NAFDAC: National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control

ABOUT PATHS2

The Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase Two (PATHS2) is a six year development initiative that aims to ensure Nigeria achieves important health-related Millennium Development Goals.

Funded by UKaid, through the UK's Department of International Development, PATHS2 is working in partnership with the Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders, to improve the planning, financing and delivery of sustainable health services for those in most need.

Apart from working at a Federal level, PATHS2 is working in the five States of Enugu, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna and Lagos.

PATHS2 follows the successful PATHS1, which ran from 2002 to 2008, and was also funded by UKaid.

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