

VOLUME 42, NUMBER 4
April 2025

ISSN 0189 - 160X

WAJM

WEST AFRICAN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE

ORIGINALITY AND EXCELLENCE IN MEDICINE AND SURGERY



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE WEST AFRICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS *AND*
WEST AFRICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INFORMATION	IC
INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS	1F
EDITORIAL NOTE:	
Toward Holistic Chronic Disease Care: Addressing the Intersecting Burdens on Patients and Caregivers in Low-Resource Health Systems – <i>G. E. Erhabor</i>	251
ORIGINAL ARTICLES	
The Burden on Caregivers and Life Satisfaction Among Caregivers of Patients with Chronic Diseases Admitted to the Emergency Department of a Tertiary Health Institution in Southwest Nigeria	253
O. E. Anjorin, S. T. Oladejo, M. O. Salami, G. O. Adebajo, S. O. Abati, E. A. Adebunmi, A. Okunade, A. Adenle, O. Ogbogu, A. Faleye, M. O. Afolabi, A. Komolafe, O. I. Olasoji, J. O. Bamgbose, O. O. Salau, M. A. Daramola	
Frequency of Depression and its Associated Factors Among Stroke Survivors in a Tertiary Hospital in Nigeria	266
G. O. Osaigbovo, G. A. Amusa, N. H. Alkali, A. I. Zoakah	
Contemporary Baseline Clinical Profile of Chronic Hypertensive Heart Failure in Ibadan, Nigeria	276
O. S. Ogah, O. A. Orimolade, A. A. Adebiyi, O. M. Adebayo, A. Aje, A. M. Adeoye, A. O. Babatunde, M. F. Okeke, O. P. Attah, F. O. Obiekwe, C. S. Onuigbo, C. M. Ogah, T. K. Afolabi, E. F. Ayodele, M. N. Odenigbo, O. O. Oladapo	
Comparative Ultrasound Evaluation of Carotid Intima-Media Thickness in Preeclamptic and Healthy Normotensive Pregnant Women at a Nigerian Tertiary Hospital	284
O. E. Ojeyemi, K. Ojeyemi, O. Ogunsuji, J. Akinmoladun, G. Obajimi, G. Ogbole	
Incidence and Short-Term Outcome of Acute Kidney Injury in Critically Ill Patients in Southern Nigeria: A Multi-Centre Retrospective Study	290
O. G. Egbi, O. A. Adejumo, O. C. Okoye, S. D. Ahmed, S. S. Owolade, O. G. Edema, V. O. Ndu, C. Erohubie	
Evaluating Serum Cystatin C as A Marker of Reduced Glomerular Filtration Rate in Pregnant Women: A Better Alternative to Creatinine?	298
O. O. Adebisi, A. K. Bakare, O. I. Adebisi, M. A. Adeniyi, A. E. Faponle, B. H. Soile, O. O. Okunola	
A Two-Year Prospective Study of the Mechanisms and Patterns of Limb Injury in Multiply Injured Patients at UNIOSUN Teaching Hospital, Osogbo, Nigeria	303
A. Adedire, S. Olarewaju, A. J. Faniyi, G. A. Oyeniyi, O. O. Ojewuyi, A. O. Ogungbemi, O. Olayemi, O. Olanipekun, O. A. Ala, A. T. Otiti	
REVIEW ARTICLE	
Barriers and Facilitators to Utilization of Cervical Cancer Screening Services in Eswatini: A Scoping Review	311
T. N. Maseko, J. M. Tsoka-Gwegweni, X. Dlamini, Rejoice Nkambule, Velephi Okello	
Health-Related Social Media Misinformation: Implications for the Burden of Noncommunicable Diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa	321
N. C. Menakaya, E. I. Unuigbo	
CASE REPORT	
Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation in West Africa: A Severe Aortic Stenosis Case Report	330
T. Majekodunmi, O. K. Oguntuga	
INDEX TO VOLUME 42, NO. 4, 2025	
Author Index	335
Subject Index	336



Health-Related Social Media Misinformation: Implications for the Burden of Noncommunicable Diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa

Désinformation Liée à la Santé sur les Réseaux Sociaux: Implications Pour le Fardeau des Maladies non Transmissibles en Afrique Subsaharienne

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND/PURPOSE: The use of social media platforms for social and educational interactions has transformed the way information sharing takes place. However, this has also exposed the public to health-related misinformation, posing significant challenges for global health. This is particularly challenging in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) now compounds existing challenges from communicable diseases. This review aimed to examine the growing challenge of health-related social media misinformation and the potential implications for NCD burden in SSA, and explore possible strategies for combating social media misinformation in the context of NCDs.

DATA SOURCE: Useful data for this review were obtained by consultation of online sources of information using search engines and online databases.

FINDINGS: Social media platforms serve various health-related purposes, including health interventions, health campaigns, medical education, disease outbreak surveillance, and behavior change. WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube are the leading platforms associated with health-related misinformation in SSA. Potential implications of health-related social media misinformation are misconceived clinical diagnosis, inappropriate self-medication and failure to adhere to evidence-based treatment modalities. **CONCLUSIONS:** Social media misinformation in the area of NCDs can potentially influence people's health-related attitudes, behaviour and undermine appropriate implementation of evidence-based interventions. Collaboration among stake holders such as healthcare professionals, religious organizations and social media influencers, as well as public awareness campaigns and regulatory policies are plausible strategies for combating the issue. There is limited research on the implications of health-related social media misinformation on NCDs in SSA highlighting the need for further studies. **WAJM 2025; 42 (4): 321-329**

KEYWORDS: Social media, Misinformation, Noncommunicable diseases, sub-Saharan Africa

RÉSUMÉ

CONTEXTE/OBJECTIF: L'utilisation des plateformes de médias sociaux pour les interactions sociales et éducatives a transformé la manière dont l'information est partagée. Cependant, cela a également exposé le public à des informations erronées liées à la santé, ce qui pose des défis majeurs pour la santé mondiale. Cette situation est particulièrement préoccupante en Afrique subsaharienne (ASS), où la charge des maladies non transmissibles (MNT) s'ajoute aux défis existants liés aux maladies transmissibles. Cette revue vise à examiner le défi croissant de la désinformation liée à la santé sur les médias sociaux et ses implications potentielles sur la charge des MNT en ASS, ainsi qu'à explorer des stratégies possibles pour lutter contre la désinformation dans ce contexte.

SOURCE DES DONNÉES: Les données utiles pour cette revue ont été obtenues par consultation de sources en ligne via des moteurs de recherche et des bases de données.

RÉSULTATS: Les plateformes de médias sociaux remplissent divers rôles liés à la santé, notamment les interventions sanitaires, les campagnes de santé publique, l'éducation médicale, la surveillance des épidémies et le changement de comportement. WhatsApp, Facebook, X (anciennement Twitter) et YouTube sont les principales plateformes associées à la désinformation en matière de santé en ASS. Les implications potentielles incluent des diagnostics erronés, l'automédication inappropriée et le non-respect des traitements fondés sur des données probantes.

CONCLUSION: La désinformation sur les MNT diffusée via les médias sociaux peut influencer les attitudes et comportements liés à la santé, et compromettre la mise en œuvre adéquate des interventions fondées sur des preuves. La collaboration entre les professionnels de santé, les organisations religieuses et les influenceurs des médias sociaux, ainsi que les campagnes de sensibilisation et les politiques réglementaires, sont des stratégies plausibles pour combattre ce phénomène. Les recherches sur les effets de la désinformation sanitaire sur les MNT en ASS restent limitées, soulignant le besoin d'études approfondies. **WAJM 2025; 42 (4): 322-329**

MOTS-CLÉS: Médias sociaux, Désinformation, Maladies non transmissibles, Afrique subsaharienne

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Abbreviations: CVD: Cardiovascular disease; DGAC: Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee; HHS: United States Department of Health and Human Services; LMICs: Low - and middle-income countries; NCDs: Noncommunicable diseases; SFAs: Saturated fatty acids; SMIs: Social media influencers; SSA: sub-Saharan Africa; USD: United States Dollars; USDA: United States Department of Agriculture