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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INFORMATION	IC
INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS	1F
EDITORIAL NOTE: <i>From Awareness to Action: Promoting Kidney Health through Education, Prevention, and Equitable Access to Care - G. E. Erhabor</i>	229
<b>ORIGINAL ARTICLES</b>	
<b>Sonographic Evaluation of Nigerian Women with Mammographic Focal Asymmetric Density</b>	233
D. U. Itanyi, H. Ibrahim, W. O. Ka'alu	
<b>Angiographic Patterns of Young Patients with Coronary Artery Disease in an Indian Population</b>	238
M. A. Ngabea, K. N. Prathap, R. Manu, S. Thanu	
<b>Prevalence of Kidney Dysfunction and Associated Risk Factors in a Southwestern City in Nigeria: a Cross-Sectional Study</b>	244
O. A. Adejumo, O. A. Junaid, O. G. Egbi, I. R. Edeki, D. S. Oyedepo, O. Fabusuyi, G. O. Akinyosoye, R. O. Oloyede	
<b>Evaluation of Inter-atrial Septal Defect Diameter and Left Ventricular Systolic Function in Children with Ostium Secundum Atrial Septal Defect in Enugu, Nigeria</b>	251
J. M. Chinawa, E. N. Ossai, A. T. Chinawa, J. T. Onyia, A. K. Daberechi, N. K. Maduka, U. K. Chukwu	
<b>Acceptability of an Orange-Flavoured Zinc Sulphate Dispersible Tablet in the Management of Acute Diarrhoea in Under-five Children in Lagos, Nigeria</b>	258
A. N. David, I. Olojo, A. O. Salako, O. Odubela, E. Ogbe, M. O. Alake, A. Oba, F. Uche-Nwachu	
<b>Children on the Streets of Ibadan Nigeria: Neglect of Children's Rights</b>	265
A. M. Obimakinde, Moosa Shabir	
<b>Erectile Dysfunction: Prevalence, and Pattern among Adult Male Patients Attending the General Out-Patient Clinic of Federal Medical Centre Bida, Nigeria</b>	277
P. N. Gara, M. Mamman, S. A. Adefemi, O. M. Imade, O. F. Olaosebikan	
<b>Prevalence and Determinants of Ocular Disorders among in-School Children with Physical and Mental Disabilities in Osun State, South West Nigeria</b>	286
O. O. Adejumo, M. A. Isawumi, B. D. Parakoyi, I. O. Faramade, S. O. Olarewaju	
<b>Trends in the Management of Miscarriages with the Implementation of the Volunteer Obstetrician Scheme in Selected Primary Health Care Centres in Maiduguri, Northeastern Nigeria</b>	293
B. Bako, B. M. Audu, A. D. Geidam, A. G. Mairiga, H. A. Usman, A. A. Kullima, S. M. Ibrahim, B. Isa, B. S. Mshelia, E. Filibus	
<b>Plasmid-Mediated Fluoroquinolone Resistance among Enterobacterales in Africa: Systematic Review</b>	301
J. Abubakar, M. Z. Sabitu, K. D. Muhammad, A. K. Jimoh, O. E. Egbe, Y. Saminu, A. Abdusalam, Y. Mohammed	
<b>Immunohistochemical Human Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor 2 (HER2) Expression Pattern in Gastric Adenocarcinomas in a Nigerian Tertiary Hospital</b>	311
M. I. Mashor, U. S. Ezenkwa, Gabriel O. Ogun, Mustapha A. Ajani, J. O. Ogunbiyi	
<b>Waiting Times in Prostate Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment: A Ten-Year Experience in A Nigerian Teaching Hospital</b>	317
C. J. Okeke, E. A. Jeje, R. W. Ojewola, M. A. Ogunjimi, U. U. Ogbobe, A. O. Obi, R. N. Babalola	
<b>Periodontal Diseases in Adult and Elderly Nigerians: A National Survey</b>	322
E. C. Otoh, O. O. Taiwo, O. J. Majekodunmi, P. O. Ameh, M. F. Gyang, A. E. Umoh, S. O. Ajike	
<b>An Evaluation of Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice of Accelerated Orthodontics amongst Orthodontists</b>	333
O. D. Umeh, A. N. Ndukwe, I. G. Isiekwe, O. O. daCosta, I. L. Utomi, O. O. Sanu	
<b>CASE REPORT</b>	
<b>Prognosticators of Excision of Giant Intra-Oral Tumors in a Resource-Challenged Setting - A Case Report</b>	342
S. Segun-Busari, H. K. Omokanye, A. D. Dunmade, O. A. Afolabi, K. A. Adeniji, K. T. Braimoh, K. C. Uche-Onkonkwo, M. F. Adeyemi, I. K. Kolawole,	
<b>REVIEWS AND META-ANALYSES</b>	
<b>Mapping of Interventions of Social Protection for Tuberculosis Patients in Africa: A Scoping Review Protocol</b>	348
A. P. Wachinou, P. Fotso, H. Loko, S. Segoun, M. Esse, C. Houessinon, V. Veronese, G. Agodokpessi, C. Merle, D. Affolabi,	
<b>INDEX TO VOLUME 41, NO. 3, 2024</b>	
Author Index	354
Subject Index	355



## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

### From Awareness to Action: Promoting Kidney Health through Education, Prevention, and Equitable Access to Care

This issue of the West African Journal of Medicine (WAJM) is being presented with great pleasure, once again offering our readers across the globe a diverse range of high-quality articles from our dedicated authors. We sincerely thank every one of our numerous contributors for their confidence, priceless input, and unwavering support, which continues to play a crucial role in the journal's progress. Each article in this edition offers valuable insights and perspectives, significantly enriching the existing body of knowledge in the respective field.

The observance of World Kidney Day (WKD) in March provides an opportunity to highlight the critical importance of kidney health. World Kidney Day is an annual global health initiative observed on the second Thursday of March. This international campaign is dedicated to raising awareness about the critical importance of kidney health, reducing the global burden of renal diseases, and mitigating their associated adverse outcomes. The WKD endeavours to highlight the crucial functions of the kidneys in maintaining homeostasis and overall health, while promoting preventative measures, early detection, and comprehensive management strategies for kidney diseases. The 2024 campaign, with the theme "Kidney Health for All –

Advancing equitable access to care and optimal medication practice" focused on increasing awareness of the significance of ensuring equitable access to appropriate treatment and care for individuals living with kidney disease, in order to improve their quality of life and delay the progression of the disease.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of kidney health cannot be overstated, as it is vital for maintaining overall bodily health. Kidney disease is a prevalent non-communicable condition affecting approximately 850 million people worldwide, with about 10 percent of adults suffering from chronic kidney disease (CKD). By 2040, CKD is projected to become the fifth leading cause of death globally due to its growing prevalence.<sup>2,3</sup> The leading risk factors for CKD globally are diabetes and hypertension which are largely amenable to primary and secondary prevention measures.

Numerous studies indicate that there is a low awareness of kidney disease in the general population globally, yet the prevalence of kidney disease is increasing across the world.<sup>2,5</sup> Hence, enhancing awareness and establishing enduring strategies for the early identification and comprehensive management of kidney disease must be at the forefront of public health objectives. Additionally, demographic shifts, the rising rates of obesity, and the

consequences of climate change are anticipated to exacerbate the prevalence of kidney disease, posing significant challenges to global survival rates, quality of life, and healthcare expenditures. Significantly, a great proportion of affected individuals and populations have limited access to optimal kidney disease treatments, thereby perpetuating existing socioeconomic disparities in health outcomes. The financial implications of kidney disease are substantial. The treatments are not only costly but also physically and emotionally taxing for patients, making the prevention of kidney disease a public health priority.<sup>3,5</sup>

Preventing kidney disease involves promoting healthy lifestyles, such as maintaining a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and avoiding harmful habits like smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Early detection through regular screening, especially for at-risk populations such as those with diabetes and hypertension, is crucial for preventing the progression of kidney disease.<sup>2,4,6</sup> Education and awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in prevention. By informing the public about the risk factors and early signs of kidney disease, individuals can take proactive steps to protect their kidney health. Healthcare providers must also be equipped with the latest knowledge

and tools to support early diagnosis and effective management of CKD.<sup>7</sup>

A number of other risk factors for kidney disease can benefit from primary and secondary preventive strategies. These include careful medication management to avoid the harmful effects of long-term use of certain drugs like NSAIDs. Managing autoimmune diseases, such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, effectively can protect kidney health. Additionally, preventing recurrent urinary tract infections and kidney stones through hydration, proper hygiene, and dietary modifications can reduce kidney disease risk.<sup>2,3</sup>

Governments at different levels and indeed all stakeholders have crucial roles in promoting kidney health through a comprehensive approach that includes public health initiatives, improved access to healthcare, and policy reforms. A comprehensive policy aimed at promoting kidney health is imperative.<sup>3,8</sup> The public and private sectors can collaborate to launch extensive nationwide awareness campaigns to educate the public about kidney health, emphasizing the importance of early detection and prevention. These campaigns can utilize various media platforms, such as social media, television, radio, and community events in order to reach a broad audience. Routine screening programs should also be implemented particularly in high-risk populations. These may include free or subsidized screenings in community centres, workplaces, and schools to enhance accessibility. There should be improved access to comprehensive healthcare services,

regular check-ups, diagnostic tests, and specialist consultations. These should be made readily available and affordable. Expanding healthcare infrastructure in rural and underserved areas can help reduce disparities in kidney health outcomes.<sup>3,8</sup>

Kidney disease, particularly in its advanced stages, can lead to substantial healthcare costs. The treatments often lead to out-of-pocket expenses that can be overwhelming for patients and their families. Hence, sustainable mechanisms for the provision of financial support and comprehensive insurance coverage for kidney disease treatments, including dialysis and transplantation, are essential for reducing the financial burden on patients, ensuring access to lifesaving care, reducing health disparities, and improving overall healthcare outcomes. These measures not only support the immediate needs of patients but also contribute to a more sustainable and equitable healthcare system.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, there is a need for increased investment in kidney disease research and support for innovations in medical technology leading to significant advancements in kidney care. This should be complemented by partnerships with international health organizations, non-profits, and the private sector towards enhancing the effectiveness of kidney health initiatives and facilitating the sharing of best practices on a global scale. Another important role of the authorities includes the development and implementation of regulations to minimize exposure to drugs,

chemical agents, environmental toxins, and pollutants that can harm kidney health. Policies addressing air and water quality, workplace safety, and the use of hazardous chemicals will also play a crucial role.

It is important to emphasize that all healthcare providers have vital roles in ensuring that patients receive timely specialist kidney care if and when necessary.<sup>6,7</sup> The process begins with the early identification of impaired renal function through routine screenings and monitoring of at-risk patients. When impaired renal function is detected, healthcare providers should facilitate timely referrals for appropriate care. Early referral allows for prompt interventions that can slow the progression of kidney disease, manage complications, and improve overall patient outcomes. In the same vein, effective communication between primary care providers and nephrologists is essential. Supporting patients in making and keeping appointments, and helping them understand the potential implications of impaired renal function, can encourage adherence to specialist care. Implementing integrated care models that facilitate collaboration between primary care, nephrology, and other relevant specialties can improve continuity of care and ensure that all aspects of the patient's health are addressed. In areas where access to nephrologists is limited, telemedicine can provide patients with timely specialist care without the need for extensive travel.

By adopting these measures, governments, healthcare providers, and other critical stakeholders can significantly reduce the burden of

kidney disease, improve patient outcomes, and enhance public health.

As I welcome you to this edition, permit me to reaffirm our dedication to maintaining WAJM as an effective and reliable scientific platform that optimally meets the publishing and reading needs of the medical community, both within our subregion and globally. The journal remains committed to consistently publishing high-quality clinical and epidemiological research in health and disease. To achieve this ongoing objective, we earnestly seek the renewed commitment and support of all our stakeholders.

**Professor Gregory E. Erhabor**

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