



# IHVN NEWS

A NEWS PUBLICATION OF THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN VIROLOGY, NIGERIA



## IRCE Hosts 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium

by Blessing Ukpabi

### From the Chief Executive Officer

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE) focused on sickle cell and cancers. This is in response to the growing need for research into non-communicable diseases and diseases affecting Nigerians. Nigeria has the most babies born with Sickle Cell Disease than any other country in the world. Globocan 2022 cancer statistics reveal that the risk of developing cancer before 75 years of age is 12.1%. Therefore, the importance of research into these diseases cannot be overemphasized. IHVN is utilizing the structures it has built over time to extend its research capacity. The July to September edition of IHVN News focuses on this novel symposium which attracted renowned sickle cell and cancer experts, Prof. Mark Gladwin and Dr. Taofeek K Owonikoko.

Happy Reading!

*Yours truly,*  
*Dr. Patrick Dakum*  
 Chief Executive Officer,  
 Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria



Executive Director, International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Prof. Alash'le Abimiku, Executive Director of the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr. Taofeek K Owonikoko, Dean, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Vice President for Medical Affairs, University of Maryland Baltimore, Dr Mark Gladwin, and IHVN Chief Executive Officer, Dr Patrick Dakum at the symposium at the IHVN Campus in Abuja.

Experts on Sickle Cell Disease and Cancers converged to exchange ideas and promote collaborative efforts at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), which held at the IHVN Campus in Abuja. At the two-day symposium, the Dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, USA, Dr. Mark Gladwin, said that Nigeria has the most babies born with Sickle Cell Disease than any country in the world.

Dr Gladwin, an expert in Sickle Cell Disease and Pulmonary Hypertension, added that "Often, Sickle Cell Disease is put on lower priority than HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis because Africa faces many infectious health challenges. In the same way that we see that HIV is controlled with medications, medications are being developed for sickle cell. What is important is to identify a baby with sickle cell early."

He recommended the use of hydroxyurea to reduce the damaging effects of sickle cell on organs and prevent complications that may occur in adulthood. "Hydroxyurea has a very big effect. It improves survival and reduces painful attacks and organ damage. It is not a cure but it makes a significant impact," the Dean said. He noted that with the progress of science, more new therapies are being developed for sickle cell disease.

Dr. Gladwin said that the University of Maryland's long standing partnership with Nigeria through the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) in HIV, tuberculosis and malaria will be leveraged upon to address non-communicable diseases like cancer, hypertension and sickle cell disease. Earlier, IHVN Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Patrick Dakum welcomed both local and international experts to the symposium and said that the Institute

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## IRCE Hosts 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium



Representatives from different sectors participate in a round table discussion on Sickle Cell Disease Future Partnerships and Capacity for Sickle Cell Disease in Nigeria.



University of Maryland School of Medicine, Vice President for Medical Affairs, Dr. Mark Gladwin giving a keynote address on "Pulmonary Hypertension and End Organ Failure in Adult Patients with Sickle Cell Disease."

is expanding its partnerships among public, private and faith-based organizations. "In terms of partnerships, ever since we started in 2004, we engaged both the public and

private sector. In terms of the grants that we are currently implementing with several actors, we are seeking partnerships with both local and international institutions," Dr Dakum

said. IRCE Executive Director, Prof. Alash'le Abimiku expressed optimism that the meeting will foster relationships to drive scientific innovation and progress. She said the center will continually strive to be "a fertile ground for discovery, collaboration and development of young talents, while promoting ethical conduct of research for the benefit of local and international communities."

## IHVN Stresses Need for Funding Cancer Research *by Blessing Ukpabi*

The Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN), Dr. Patrick Dakum has stressed the need for funding cancer research to address the disease in Nigeria. Dr. Dakum said this during the 2nd Annual Scientific Symposium of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE) in Abuja.

"We are learning that to get a drug to treat most cancers, you must invest between 100 million to one billion dollars over years. This is an investment in research alone, not yet in providing care and treatment for people. Nigeria needs to put money into solving local problems with local solutions. We are still grappling with ensuring that the person who needs malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV treatment gets it and 80% of that is still paid for from outside the country," Dr Dakum said.

He said that many factors have led to poor treatment for cancer patients such as lack of skilled human resources and early retirement of more experienced physicians due to the retirement age. "You don't allow experienced people to



IHVN CEO Dr. Patrick Dakum addressing Symposium Attendees

leave, you ensure that the mentoring they have started with younger people is continued. For us at IHVN, this symposium is an opportunity for experience sharing, not just with experts from within Nigeria but with those from other countries like the United States.

We see an improved collaboration between scientists from the University of Maryland and Nigerian scientists, which is a win-win. They will tell you that they are not just here to teach but also to learn from local scientists. With experience sharing across all levels, we can look forward to better implementation and utilization of existing resources and structures to care for both infectious and non-infectious diseases," the CEO said.

Also at the symposium, Prof. King-David Terna Yawe, a breast surgeon and



A cross section of Symposium Participants

surgical oncologist, said that the incidence of cancers in the country is alarming and requires finances.

"It is right that the government has set up the National Institute for Cancer Research and Treatment (NICRAT). It is also important to back up that body with the facilities to work and there has to be a good contribution from the government, from the non-governmental sector, from the industry and so on. Cancer is everybody's business. One of the challenges that our generation faces is that as we try to conquer infectious diseases, we are opening the room for non-communicable diseases to take over and the statistics show that increasing incidence of cancer. Out of every ten people, one of them will come down with cancer. That means that we have to prepare for tomorrow," he said.

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# IRCE Symposium: Cancer Expert Stresses Need for National Cancer Policy

by Blessing Ukpabi

The Executive Director of the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr. Taofeek Owonikoko has stressed the need for a national plan and policy to address the growing cancer challenge in the country.

Dr. Owonikoko said this at the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE) 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium on Sickle Cell and Cancers in the country.

He noted that “there are pockets of expertise around the different states of the country but it does not seem as if we have a national plan and policy to help build those pockets of expertise and infrastructure or a strategic plan on how to tackle that challenge in the next five, ten, twenty years.”

He added that there is a need for interaction among stakeholders and policymakers to make plans about cancer prevention, treatment, and care.

Dr. Owonikoko, who is a specialist in medical oncology, hematology, and internal medicine, made a presentation at the symposium on “Oncologic Health: Burden, Capacity and Benefits.”



Executive Director of the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr Taofeek Owonikoko delivering a keynote presentation on Oncologic Health.



Executive Director of the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr Taofeek Owonikoko with the Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Prof. Alash'le Abimiku at the IRCE 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium in Abuja



A cross-section of participants during a plenary session at the IRCE 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium in the IHVN Campus, Abuja.

have the highest numbers of new cases and estimated number of deaths in Nigeria. However, Dr. Owonikoko encouraged patients not to lose hope. “The last thing that leaves a person is hope. There is always hope and hope is not just in terms of advanced treatment. The hope is that people care about the problems they have. We may not have solutions today but scientists are working day and night to find that solution.”

The second day of the symposium focused on oncology and cancer care and research. There were discussions on improving cancer research in Nigeria and expanding access to oncology care and diagnostic infrastructure for cancer research.

Dr. Owonikoko, who currently serves as an elected board member and treasurer-elect of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, chaired the roundtable panel discussion on cancer care research by the private sector and researchers.

Also, at the symposium IRCE Executive Director, Prof. Alash'le Abimiku said that

“We are still working on infectious diseases that can cause outbreaks like COVID-19 but it is very important for us to look at non-communicable diseases.”, She Said.

According to Globocan 2020 Statistics, breast, prostate and cervical cancers

# IHVN Builds Capacity for Quality TB Data

by Joy Onuoha



A cross-section of participants during one of the trainings on data reporting



USAID TB LON 3 Lagos Team Lead, Dr. Babajide Kadri addressing the participants at a training on data reporting and management.

One of the participants, Mr James Yusuf said that, “the training was impactful and specifically impacted on data reporting, data accuracy, timeliness

To improve tuberculosis data quality and management in Lagos, Osun, Ogun, and Oyo states, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has built the capacity of more than 240 monitoring and evaluation officers, field officers, and cluster coordinators.

The training activities were organized by the USAID Tuberculosis Local Organizations 3 (TB LON 3) project and featured structured presentations and interactive practical sessions to facilitate smooth data reporting on tuberculosis prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment. Participants were trained in high-quality data recording and reporting using tuberculosis documentation tools and in coordinating, collecting, and reviewing community intervention data. Cluster Coordinators were also trained on proper DOTS referral linkage coordination and data safety and

confidentiality.

USAID TB LON 3 Director Strategic Information, Engr. Pedro Michael said that “improved data quality, enhanced understanding of reporting tools, better data triangulation, standardization of processes, improved accountability and supervision and enhanced analytical skills of the field staff in data collection and data validation will lead to better decision making and improved program outcomes.”

The Lagos State Team Lead, Dr Babajide Kadri said, “The training was successful as it helped the field staff to understand key monitoring and evaluation concepts needed in their daily work routine. The training approach used also established the balance between knowledge and practice of these key concepts which is essential to helping them address bottlenecks encountered during program implementation.”

of data and advocacy skills in the field.”

USAID TB LON 3 project is focused on innovatively engaging all stakeholders to find missing TB cases and rapidly scale up TB service coverage. The project is implemented in communities in 103 local government areas in four states and in strengthening their systems to provide quality tuberculosis services. It actively seeks cases that have hitherto been missed in the facilities and communities through awareness and sensitization.

From April 2020 to August 2024, across four states, 22, 902,474 individuals have been screened for tuberculosis with 1,583,351 presumptive cases. 1,540,201 presumptive cases have been evaluated, 124,655 individuals have been diagnosed with tuberculosis and 117,807 individuals have enrolled on treatment for tuberculosis.

## News- in-Brief

## IHVN Partners PCRC on TB Sensitization, Outreaches

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has partnered with the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) to sensitize police officers and provide medical outreaches in several communities in Lagos State.

Sensitization activities were held monthly between July and September in PCRC Zone 2 Command Headquarters Onikan, PCRC Area C Police Command Surulere, PCRC Area G



Police Officers gather for free medical services in a screening outreach in Area B Command headquarters in Apapa, Lagos State.

Command Ogba, PCRC Lagos State Command Ikeja GRA, PCRC Area H Command Ogudu and PCRC Area B Command Headquarters in Apapa. Free medical services such as

tuberculosis screening, HIV testing services, blood pressure check, eye check and free routine drugs were provided during outreaches at the police command venues.

A mobile chest x-ray van was on standby to link individuals diagnosed with tuberculosis to care.

A total of 1,382 were screened and positive cases linked to care during the outreaches.

# Photo Gallery



IHVN staff participating in a team-building game session at the annual cookout organized by the Office of the Chief Operating Officer and Managing Director, Dr. Charles Olalekan Mensah in commemoration of July 4th, American Independence Day.



Medical Laboratory Students from the University of Abuja participate in a guided tour of laboratories in the IHVN Campus during a courtesy visit to the Institute to gain first hand insights into healthcare research.



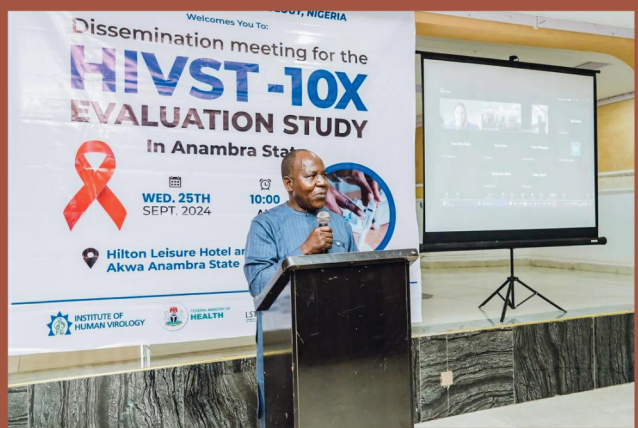
Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) Chief Executive Officer, Dr Patrick Dakum presenting an awards to a beneficiary of the Accelerating Nutrition Results in Nigeria (ANRiN) project at a close-out ceremony in Kano State. IHVN implemented the ANRiN project in nine local government areas in Kano State from May 2021 to July 2024.



Executives from Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria (IHVN) and University of Abuja Teaching Hospital pose for a group photograph with the visiting Dean of University of Maryland School of Medicine, Dean Mark T. Gladwin and his team during his visit to Nigeria.



IHVN INFORM Africa Project Research Hub Assistant, Mrs Adeola Ann Nicholas sensitizing students on the INFORM Africa Project



IHVN Technical Advisor Prevention, Mr. Silas Gurumdi participating in a dissemination meeting for the HIVST-10X Evaluation Study in Anambra state where key stakeholders, government officials and community leaders gathered to share insight, foster collaboration and support informed health policy on HIV self-testing.

# Stakeholders Meet on Acute Febrile Illness Surveillance

by Luret Dakum



Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Prof Alash'le Abimiku giving her opening remarks at the AFI meeting held in Abuja

Director of the Division of Global Health Protection at the US CDC, Dr. Farah Husain who noted that the transition meeting “marks the culmination of two years of hard work and the beginning of the next phase of our partnership in this vital initiative.”

She emphasized the importance of acute febrile illness surveillance as a key component of overall public health efforts, noting that fever, a common symptom of various infections, is often misdiagnosed and incorrectly treated, contributing to drug resistance and increased morbidity and mortality.

According to her, “AFI surveillance with laboratory confirmation can help us better understand circulating pathogens and respond to emerging and re-emerging disease threats. Setting up a robust AFI surveillance system takes time, but its success will be measured by its ability to quickly detect and reduce the spread of disease within Nigeria, across its borders, and enhance global health protection.”

Director General of NCDC, Dr. Jide Idris, who was represented by the NCDC Director, Special Duties, Dr. John Oladejo said that the meeting is the beginning of a new chapter in surveillance efforts.

“This transition is not merely a handover of responsibilities but rather an opportunity to identify and address concerns, recalibrate our strategies, integrate new insights and ensure our surveillance systems are robust, responsive and adaptable to the everchanging landscape of febrile illnesses,” he said.

To enhance surveillance and response to acute febrile illness in Nigeria, the Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria (IHVN) has hosted a collaborative meeting with the Nigeria Centers for Disease Control (NCDC), US Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC), representatives from the Federal and State Ministry of Health, health care workers and other stakeholders.

The two-day meeting in Abuja reviewed the progress of the Acute Febrile Illness Surveillance (AFIS) Project. The AFIS project commenced in 2022 to determine the cause of AFI among different age groups and strengthen the epidemiological and laboratory capacity of the country to address acute febrile illness.

At the meeting, the Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE) Prof. Alash'le Abimiku, highlighted the essential role of collaboration in advancing Nigeria's healthcare system. She reaffirmed the commitment of all partners to support the Nigerian government in implementation of the project as it



Program Director of the Division of Global Health Protection at US Centers for Disease Control (USCDC) Farah Hussain addressing the stakeholders at the meeting.

transitions to NCDC and the State Ministry of Health for sustainability.

“One of the lessons that we have learned from the project is that we are aware of the diseases that are circulating in our population. As we survey our population, we know which region is affected so that NCDC responds to diseases in good time,”

Prof. Abimiku added that the groundwork laid through these partnerships would facilitate a smooth transition of the AFIS project. “The success of this transition—and of our broader surveillance efforts—depends on each of us,”

The AFIS Transition Workshop also featured remarks from Programme

## University of Maryland Dean of Medicine Visits LUTH

by Joy Onuoha

The Dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Prof. Mark T. Gladwin, has visited the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) to discuss partnerships on sickle cell disease and cancer research.

During his visit, Prof. Gladwin made a seminar presentation at the Center for Clinical Trials, Research, and Implementation Science (CCRIS) on “Pulmonary Hypertension and End-Organ Failure in Adult Patients with Sickle Cell Disease.”

He said that Nigeria has a high prevalence of sickle cell disease with “more children living with sickle cell disease than all the other countries in the world”. Prof. Gladwin called for more research into the disease, especially as people are living longer with it and might have organ complications.

The Chief Medical Director of LUTH, Prof Wasiu Adeyemo, welcomed Prof. Gladwin and stated that collaboration is pivotal in building the capacity of medical practitioners in the country. “In the next few weeks, LUTH is going to do the first transplant for sickle cell in



A cross-section of the dignitaries at Lagos University Teaching Hospital during the presentations.

Nigeria and definitely, that will need a lot of support from those who have the experience,” he said.

Executive Director of the University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB) Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr. Taofeek Owonikoko, also made a presentation on “Building the Human Resource and Infrastructure for Oncogenic Health” during the visit.

He emphasized the need to build institution-to-institution partnerships in Nigeria and Africa to advance the management of non-communicable diseases. He revealed that there would be an 80% increase in cancer diagnosis and death between now and 2040 in Africa.

“We must do research that is problem-driven while we collaborate with colleagues who research and practice in well-resourced areas.

We should not be ashamed to seek collaboration with our colleagues who operate in better-funded environments,” Dr. Owonikoko said.

The visiting team also included the Associate Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Cancer Center, Prof. Clement Adebamowo, UMB Division Head, Epidemiology and Prevention at the Institute of Human Virology, Prof. Man Charurat, Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Patrick Dakum, IHVN Chief Operating Officer and Managing Director, Dr. Charles Olalekan Mensah and Executive Director, International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Prof. Alash'le Abimiku.

They conducted a tour of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Nigeria's Sovereign Wealth Fund NSIA-LUTH Cancer Center, and facilities of the Sickle Cell Foundation Nigeria.

## Health Research Should Benefit Nigerians - IRCE Executive Director

by Blessing Ukpabi

“It is not about taking a child abroad for better health care. Health care research should gear up so that we can have children with sickle cell have little or no crisis.” Catherine said Another participant and speaker at the IRCE symposium, Dr Victoria Igbinomwanhia said that the meeting was enlightening and engaging on the “different concepts, challenges, enablers, barriers and strategies from the perspective of

users, health care workers, implementers and recipients of healthcare services.”

Dr Igbinomwanhia who presented on the topic, “Leveraging the PEPFAR Program to Prevent Cancers – IHVN Experience,” said that the lessons learned at the meeting can be applied to sickle cell disease and cancer research.

The theme of the IRCE 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium was, “Expanding Partnerships to Sickle Cell Disease and Cancer Research. The two-day meeting attracted experts from within and outside Nigeria including the Dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Dr. Mark T. Gladwin, and the Executive Director of the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer

# Health Research Should Benefit Nigerians - IRCE Executive Director

by Blessing Ukpabi

The Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE) at the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN), Prof. Alash'le Abimiku has said that health research should benefit Nigerians and give a better understanding of diseases. Prof. Abimiku said this at the IRCE 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Symposium on sickle cell disease and cancers.

“The target of this symposium is to work towards ensuring that research in the country benefits the citizens of Nigeria. It is a strategic move to expand to non-communicable diseases because not all of the health challenges that we have in the country are a result of HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria. We need to look at non-communicable diseases and the reason that we are focusing on sickle cell disease is that it targets the black population. We must benefit our population. Our target is to make sure that we understand the diseases, bring in international collaborators and investigators, and use our research findings to better inform how we can reduce the mortality and morbidity as a result of these two diseases.

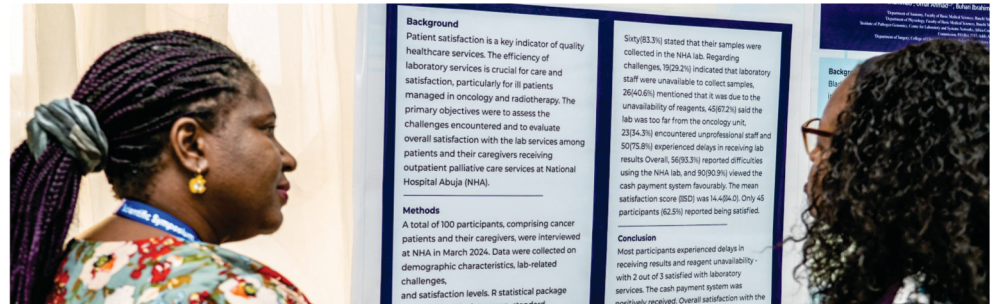
On cancer, WHO has predicted that by



Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE) Prof. Alash'le Abimiku addressing participants at the IRCE 2<sup>nd</sup> Scientific Symposium in Abuja.



The Executive Director of the University of Maryland Marlene and Steward Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr. Taofeek Owonikoko, IRCE Executive Director, Prof. Alash'le Abimiku and the Dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Dr. Mark T. Gladwin at the symposium on sickle cell and cancers.



A researcher, Catherine A., presenting an abstract on cancers at the symposium.

2050, the number of individuals who are dying as a result of cancer will double and most will be male. We hope that we can expand some more and join forces for more diagnosis and treatment to benefit the Nigerian citizens,” she said.

The IRCE Executive Director also stressed the need for better diagnostic tests, and education of the public and

all stakeholders about prevention and treatment of both sickle cell and cancer.

“We need to focus on what we can do with diet, exercise, and a lot more to prevent cancer. I'm hoping that with meetings like this, we will bring more light to sickle cell and cancer,” she said.

A participant and researcher at the symposium, Catherine A. noted that research provides the evidence to guide the management of diseases including sickle cell disease and cancers.

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This publication (newsletter) was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number PS002929 from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria (IHVN) and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC. For more information contact the Editor, IHVN Campus, Plot 62 Emeritus Umar Shehu Avenue, Cadastral Zone, COO, Abuja, FCT, P. O. Box 9396, Garki, Abuja - Nigeria Or call us on 09 461 0342. Visit us at [www.ihvnigeria.org](http://www.ihvnigeria.org)