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First word

Asthma: an ignored disease in Africa

It is thought that about 300 million people in the world currently suffered from asthma. This number is estimated to rise to 400 million by the year 2025, which is an alarming increase. While it is true that most asthma sufferers reside in the Western world, recent evidence has shown that the disease is on the increase in low-income countries.

Many reasons have been attributed to this, including the rural–urban migration, adoption of Western lifestyle, and the increased threshold of diagnosing the disease.

The triad of HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis have remained the focus of many health policies in the developing world. While this is commendable it should not lead to neglect of the so-called non-communicable diseases such as asthma, COPD, and occupational lung diseases.

In many regions of Africa, asthma is still under-diagnosed, mis-diagnosed, and poorly managed. Research on asthma mortality, has shown that most asthma deaths are largely preventable. Physicians, by following set guidelines and increasing their diagnostic awareness of the disease, can help in reducing the burden of this condition in the developing world and possibly reduce its mortality.

In this issue of the *African Journal of Respiratory Medicine*, the article on peak flow meter and its use in clinical practice shows that this instrument is easily available, inexpensive, easy to use, and can help in the diagnosis, management, and monitoring of patients with asthma. All doctors in peripheral hospitals ought to be aware of its use and, as shown in this article; it can add value to the diagnosis of asthma.

It is hoped that priority will be given to the treatment of asthma by equipping hospitals with lung function instruments, providing nebulisers, and upgrading intensive care units. This will go a long way in helping to manage patients with acute severe asthma.

Prof Gregory Erhabor

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