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First word

Respiratory diseases have been reported to cause immense health burdens worldwide; each year about 4 million people die prematurely from chronic respiratory diseases.

In recent decades, modern medicine has advanced the length and quality of life in most countries. At the same time, increasing health costs have threatened many nations financial health and the effort needed to care for the ill and dying affects national productivity. Poor health along with lack of education and lack of an enabling political structure are the major impediments to a country's development.

In the past, focus has been on communicable diseases with a thrust on tuberculosis. However, there has been an increasing awareness on the importance of the non-communicable diseases such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and lung cancer.

The incidence of lung cancer has been on the increase and the aetiology may differ between the developing and the more developed countries. However, the role of occupational lung diseases cannot be overemphasised. The increasing use of biomass fuel and smoking also has a tremendous role to play.

To this effect, The Forum of International Societies (FIRS) have keyed into the efforts by United Nations to tackle these problems (see Report on page 4). The greatest burden to this society has been the 'big five' respiratory conditions. The first step for respiratory health is to prevent illness before it occurs.

The FIRS vision of controlling and eliminating respiratory diseases requires the use of current effective tools, coupled with investment in respiratory research to help control these diseases by providing better and more effective treatment methods.

In addition to public health measures, developing healthcare capacity requires the education of clinicians and researchers. The recruitment and input of a wider spectrum of medical personnel from the African sub-region would help to give the document a more balanced outlook.

While the FIRS' roadmap has some merits, it has to take a more comprehensive look into the challenges of these respiratory diseases and proffer pragmatic solutions.

Prof Gregory Erhabor, Co-Editor, AJRM

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