Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals

Meeting Minutes, May 22, 2021

Host: Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals

Date: May 22, 2021

Chair: Dr. Munoh Kenne Foma

Co-Moderators: Elvis Ndansi (lead moderator), Louisa Viban, Dr. Bryan Tegomoh

Distinguished Guests: Dr. Denis Nsame (Director, Bamenda Regional Hospital), Dr. Boghuma Kabisen Titanji (infectious diseases physician, USA), Dr. Obadia Mfuh Kenji (laboratory scientist, Stanford University), A clinical biochemist from Canada, A critical care physician, Dr. Judwin Ndzo (paediatrician, UK), A doctor working on diabetes in Cameroon, A senior clinician

Title: First Anniversary of the Cameroon Town Hall: One Year in Review and the Way Forward

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Agenda Items:

1. Welcome and opening remarks by Elvis Ndansi
2. COVID-19 update by the Chair, Dr. Munoh Kenne Foma
3. Presentation by a co-moderator on interventions to address vaccine hesitancy
4. Reflections from the moderators and the Chair on the Town Hall's origins
5. Review of the first 12 months of sessions by Elvis Ndansi
6. Testimonies and suggestions from members
7. Closing remarks and next meeting

Opening Remarks:

- Elvis Ndansi opened the first anniversary edition, noting the Town Hall meets every fortnight and thanking the presenters of the previous session on malaria.
- The Chair reported more than 165 million COVID-19 cases and about 3.5 million deaths worldwide, and 1.6 billion vaccine doses given. Cameroon was still in its second wave, with vaccination coverage of about 0.1 percent, mainly Sinopharm and AstraZeneca, and he estimated 10 years to reach herd immunity at that pace. He questioned whether all vaccines are equal, citing rising cases in the Seychelles

and Chile with high Sinopharm coverage, urged patent waivers and dose sharing, and said corticosteroids remained the main treatment.

- Dr. Bryan Tegomoh said the pandemic had exposed weak disease surveillance, under-investment in public health and health inequities, and called for a global disease detection system drawing on the expertise of members such as Dr. Kenji.

Presentation Points:

Presentation: "One Year of the Cameroon Town Hall, and Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy"

1. Vaccine hesitancy is complex:

The presenter, an epidemiologist and co-moderator, explained that hesitancy ranges from accepting some vaccines to refusing all, varies by context, time and vaccine, and is shaped by confidence, complacency and convenience. Even 100 percent coverage does not mean there is no hesitancy. WHO had listed it among the top 10 threats to global health in 2019.

2. What the evidence says:

Drawing on two 2015 reviews linked to WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (an overview of 15 reviews and a systematic review of 181 studies), she said interventions fall into education, incentives, dialogue, reminders and policy. No single intervention is proven; multi-component, tailored approaches work best, while passive measures such as posters and radio spots do little on their own.

3. Approaches that show promise:

Dialogue with religious and traditional leaders worked in polio campaigns in northern Nigeria and francophone West and Central Africa. Reminder messages raise uptake. Training health workers to communicate about vaccines matters because many health workers were themselves hesitant about COVID-19 vaccines. Mandates and incentives may raise coverage without resolving hesitancy.

4. How the Town Hall began:

The Chair said the idea came in early 2020 while he worked as an internist in New York, where his hospital had more than 1,000 COVID-19 patients and about 300 intubated at one point. He wanted health workers in Cameroon to learn from those mistakes, and shared the idea with Elvis Ndansi and a fellow co-moderator. After COVID-19 the group widened to other health problems.

5. Twelve months of sessions:

Elvis Ndansi reviewed the year, from the first conversation in June 2020 on prevention of a pandemic, through case management in the North West, traditional medicine and mental health, pooled testing (Dr. Kenji), evidence-based medicine with the South African Cochrane Centre, clinical trial registries, children and schools, vaccine hesitancy, pharmaceutical regulation, audit and feedback, cervical cancer, telemedicine, maternal and infant mortality, neurosurgery (about 20 neurosurgeons in Cameroon), tuberculosis, variants and malaria.

6. Reach and culture:

He said attendance grew from about 15 people at the first session to 1,012 registered Cameroonian health professionals from more than 30 countries, and that discussions had stayed respectful, with everyone treated as equals. A co-moderator had created the Cameroon Digest, a compilation of research by or about Cameroon plus scholarship opportunities. He announced plans to invite the Minister of Public Health.

Discussions and Q&A Session:

- **What should the Town Hall do next? (Dr. Boghuma Kabisen Titanji)** She proposed turning the network into research collaborations that produce data, formalising mentor and mentee matching, and seeking continuing medical education (CME) accreditation for sessions.
- **Comment from Dr. Kenji** He supported CE credits through recorded sessions with short quizzes on the website, and suggested pairing experts with students in Cameroon to co-present.
- **Comment from a clinical biochemist in Canada** He said the laboratory diagnosis session helped him validate COVID-19 assays at a large northern Canadian laboratory, and encouraged PhD holders to consider clinical laboratory science fellowships.
- **Comment from Dr. Denis Nsame, Director of Bamenda Regional Hospital** He thanked the Chair for weekly support during the hospital's COVID-19 response, said only 167 of the hospital's 510 staff for 400 beds are government employed, and invited diaspora members to support projects such as the intensive care unit and dialysis centre.
- **Comments from members** A critical care physician, Dr. Judwin Ndzo, a pharmacist and others described learning, networking, mentoring and mental health support. Louisa Viban and another member said the Town Hall had helped them secure residency places. Another member asked that sessions keep to two hours.

- **Is the Town Hall open to French-speaking colleagues? (a senior clinician)** Elvis Ndansi said the Town Hall is for all Cameroonians and welcomes presentations in French; a co-moderator asked for volunteers to help prepare French flyers. The Chair said the platform belongs to all participants and that anaesthetists, pharmacists and people living with sickle cell disease would be invited.

Call to Action and Closing:

- Elvis Ndansi thanked members and invited French-speaking colleagues to co-moderate.
- The Chair said the Town Hall exists so that the diaspora and colleagues at home solve problems together rather than blame each other.
- The next session was announced for a fortnight later.

Next Meeting

In a fortnight (June 5, 2021): Heart Attack: The Hidden Pandemic in Cameroon and Africa.

Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZd2jh28tOg

Submitted by: Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals