Discussing and Adopting Appropriate Measures and Protocols against COVID-19

In August 2014, following the outbreak of Ebola virus disease in Nigeria, there was a frenetic response by the general public against the spread of the virus. Most of the spontaneous public responses were non-pharmaceutical and non-scientific preventing measures. The most popular of the bizarre measure was the “salt-bath” which source remained unknown. Salt became expensive and scarce in the market as everyone scrambled to buy as much quantity as was available because of the advisory in the public domain that a salt-bath was a preventive medicine against the deadly Ebola disease which had resulted in fatalities of some individuals who had contracted it, since the reported index case, Patrick Sawyer, a Liberian-America arrived in Lagos, Nigeria.

There is no doubt that taking in consideration the acidic and sodium chloride content of salt, some damage may have been done to some persons’ skin, particularly those who did the salt-bath severally. The Ebola virus was quickly and successfully quashed, as the Federal Ministry of Health, on 22nd September, 2014 announced that there was no case of Ebola in Nigeria again as of that date. All thanks definitely not to the salt-bath but due to appropriate scientific, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures.

In December, 2019, the world was greeted with the outbreak of Coronavirus and with its widespread and attendant fatalities, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it pandemic which has continued to ravage the globe. Unlike the Ebola virus, almost ten (10) months down the line, there is no sign of any light at the end of the tunnel, in terms of when the outbreak will be extinguished. Everyone in the world is looking forward to the end of Coronavirus. While some experts have predicted that it will be with us for some time to come, others have conjured that the virus has come to stay.

As the world makes frantic efforts at developing vaccines against the novel and deadly Coronavirus (COVID-19), the globe has again been inundated with an unprecedented cocktail of possible preventive and curative solutions, yet, none, with any scientifically proven efficacy. This desperate reaction of the world is not unexpected, as the strange ailment has taken its toll on the world with many fatalities.

In Nigeria, aside the conventional protocols issued by health agencies to curtail the spread of the virus, including constant washing of hands with soap under running water, constant use of sanitizers, keeping of social and physical distancing and wearing of face masks, many individuals and organisations have equally either introduced or adopted a number of additional measures, all aimed at either preventing, curing or stopping the spread of the virus.

In order to fully understand and appreciate the magnitude of the health challenge, and coupled with the need to save the lives of citizens of Nigeria around the world and all residents in the country, the Nation at the highest level set up a Presidential Task Force against the Pandemic with the Secretary to the Government of the Federation as its Chairman, and membership drawn from the Federal Executive Council and other top professionals and experts in disease control. States
Government have also responded in like manner with most of them appointing Deputy Governors as the Head of the COVID-19 Team.

Nevertheless, there have been strong professional arguments for and against some of the pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures being variously adopted, particularly in public places. These arguments have been ventilated in almost equal and convincing measures and the general public is becoming confused and concerned as to whether these measures are life-saving or life-threatening. For example, disinfectant booths have become common sight in public buildings, whereby chemical is sprayed or showered on human skin each time one passes through the booth. The use of body disinfectant booths and tunnels have been supported, as there have vociferous arguments against them by different professional individuals and bodies.

Recently, while the Federal Ministry of Education has persuaded educational institutions to install body disinfectant tunnels as Government looks at the possibility of full resumption of schools, the Ministry of Aviation, following the resumption of flights, has dissuaded the use of the same disinfectant tunnels at the nation’s airports.

On hand washing, the World Health Organization (WHO) in its Patient Safety document recommends 40-60 seconds of hand washing for effectiveness of cleaning as itrecognises hands as the main pathways of germ transmission during health care while the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has instead recommended 20 seconds of hand washing.

Some professionals have also argued that hand washing with soap alone is not completely effective without the additional use of alcohol based sanitizers, while some experts have argued that one can serve in place of the other.

Meanwhile, what is the effect of too much sanitizer (another chemical) on the hand? As we are advised to use this chemical frequently. What is the effect of face/nose masks on our breathing? Especially for those with respiratory issues or those who are advanced in age.

These are some the contentious issues that require further discussion and interrogation in order to expand the horizon of our knowledge and help protect and save lives that may be threatened because of ignorance or too much benightedness.

The consolation is that there has been no recommended or adopted bizarre primitive measure such as self-bath this time around, but the side effect of some of the modern measures can also be severe and deadly and such measure would need to be checked.

As part of its contribution to the fight against COVID-19, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in collaboration with the Nigerian Defence Academy and Premium Times is hosting a Virtual Colloquium:

**Day/Date:** Tuesday, 11th August, 2020

**Time:** 10:00am

Presentations will be made by the following professionals:

1. Presidential Task Force on COVID-19
2. Executive Vice Chairman/Chief Executive  
   National Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI)

2. Director-General  
   National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD)

3. Deputy Managing-Director and Professor of Chemistry,  
   Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) Consultancy Services

4. Director-General  
   Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)

Dr. Yusuf Lawal  
Director, Test Administration  
Chairman, Colloquium Planning Committee