



## **REPORT ON THE 1<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE MEDICAL MYCOLOGY SOCIETY OF NIGERIA**

The Medical Mycology Society of Nigeria, an interdisciplinary body with over fifty registered members focused on education, research and advocacy about fungal infections came into existence in April, 2017. With support from ISHAM, ECMM, UNITAID, CHAI as well as sponsorship from pharmaceutical and diagnostic companies, the fledgling society successfully organized its first International Scientific Conference from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 at the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in Lagos, Nigeria. The theme was ‘Managing serious mycoses: circumventing challenges in a resource limited country’ and the event featured various speakers from within and outside Africa.

Prior to the opening ceremony, a 2-day pre-conference workshop took place at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH). The workshop featured didactic lectures on the organization of a medical mycology laboratory, specimen handling and basic techniques as well as practical ‘hands-on’ work on the laboratory identification of yeasts and moulds. Total number of registered participants was thirty-three.

The conference kicked off with a rousing keynote address delivered by Professor A. Chakrabarti, the president of the International Society of Human and Animal Mycology (ISHAM). This was followed by an account by the society’s president, Dr. Rita Oladele, of the milestones achieved

thus far in tackling serious fungal infections in Nigeria. Perspectives from other African countries were shared by Dr Christine Mandengue of Cameroun and Mr Bright Ocansey of Ghana, both of whom alluded to similar problems of lack of awareness, paucity of epidemiological data, poor laboratory diagnostic support and inaccessibility of essential antifungal agents. Other highlights of the first day one were sessions on diagnostics, *Candida* infections, mycetomas and oral presentations of scientific abstracts. There was a gala night with a live musical band performing.

A robust discussion on advanced HIV disease and AIDS-related mycoses took place on day two, this was chaired by Dr Armamillo (Senior Associate, CHAI) and Dr Onotu (PEPFAR, CDC). The pitfalls of the current 'test and treat' strategy, the failure to implement cryptococcal antigen screening in Nigeria and partnerships that promise to solve the menace of advanced HIV were highlighted. Amongst other burning issues, the neglected nature of disseminated histoplasmosis on the continent and insights from the immunology of *Pneumocystis jirovecii* in mouse models were presented by field experts Drs Christine Mandengue and Claire Hoving respectively. Professor Jean-Pierre Gangneux, the General Secretary of the European Confederation of Medical Mycology (ECMM) discussed extensively chronic pulmonary aspergillosis as an emerging topic in Africa and elsewhere. He also gave a talk on new tools for the diagnosis of aspergillosis such as molecular and NGS techniques, this lecture induced many questions that led to robust discussions.

Total attendance at conference was 92 registered participants from across Nigeria and Africa (Cameroun, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and South Africa). There were 20 abstracts accepted for presentation. There were wonderful networking opportunities and collaborations set up.

## **Observations from the meeting**

1. There is a pervasive lack of data, diagnostics and antifungals in Africa as evidenced by the experiences shared from Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana.
2. Poor awareness is a problem in most African countries. Health workers, governments and the general society remain largely ignorant about invasive fungal infections.
3. Mycetoma, a disease of the poor's poor is poorly understood and continues to have poor outcomes as many patients present late due to lack of access to healthcare and adequate diagnostic tools.
4. Advanced HIV disease is a huge problem in Nigeria and indeed, Africa. A misunderstanding of the test and treat strategy coupled with lack of diagnostics for opportunistic infections and stock-outs of CD4 testing in many ART treatment programs threatens the lives of the many patients living with advanced HIV disease.
5. Pulmonary tuberculosis presents a quagmire being underdiagnosed at the same time it is being overdiagnosed.

Key resolutions and actions taken at the conference include

1. Resolution by the society to advocate for at least three reference laboratories in Nigeria. Reference labs are also needed in each of the African sub-regions.
2. Dire need for capacity building to ensure proper patient management of the at 'risk' population.
3. The need for extensive collaboration within and outside the region was emphasized.
4. The inauguration of the Pan African Mycology Working Group consisting of members drawn from Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa under the guidance of Professor Chakrabarti and Prof. Jean-Pierre Gangneux. The group has applied

for affiliation with ISHAM; it is expected to organize educational/training activities, design and conduct collaborative studies and carry out advocacy.

The closing ceremony and presentation of award and certificates by Prof. Jean Pierre Gagneux concluded the highly successful 3-day event.

The next conference is scheduled to hold in 2021.



*Participants at the pre-conference workshop*





*Professor Gangneux delivering a session on chronic pulmonary aspergillosis*



