

Ebola cannot be conquered without understanding Africa's culture, politics and poverty

September 30 2015, by Tina Shelton



Dr. Felix Ikuomola is treating patient in Nigeria, January 2015. Credit: Felix Ikuomola, M.D.

Felix I. Ikuomola, MD, Liberia's Physician of the Year in 2006, recounts his real-life experiences with Ebola while analyzing the influences of war, cultural traditions, politics and poverty in the spread of the disease in (published by iUniverse, July 10, 2015.)

Ikuomola's unique perspective allows the reader to appreciate how "social conflicts, wars, corruption, (and) bribery" inhibited the creation of adequate public health facilities in West Africa, where life expectancy at the best of times is as low as 46 years old (Sierra Leone). "Most West African public health facilities do not have enough beds, medications, or functioning medical equipment," he writes, adding that many of the instruments in hospitals there are outdated and no longer relevant or useful.

His fascinating experiences include encounters with "[traditional healers](#)" who are frequently the first (and only) source of medical advice for citizens in rural parts of those countries where—perhaps not surprisingly—Ebola began its most recent spread to epidemic proportions and triggered a worldwide health scare.

"African traditional healers consult spirits through incantation, divination or via mediums," Ikuomola writes. His text proposes the creation of a traditional-healer program to engage traditional healers, faith healers, herbalists, and birth attendants in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and his native Nigeria. His idea is "to study what traditional healers know and what they are doing, so as to be able to advise them on safe traditional African medicinal practices." He suggests nearby health facilities affiliate themselves with the traditional healers, allowing them to be classified as Alternative Medicine Practitioners as is being done in China and other parts of the world where population far exceeds medical workers.



Sewa Fare dancer (Honolulu) performs traditional tribal welcoming dance in West African themed launch ceremony for new Ebola book. Credit: Amanda Shell

Ikuomola also reports the viral hemorrhagic fever is worsened in West Africa by an "academic hemorrhagic syndrome" that has left the region even more vulnerable to Ebola. "West Africa witnessed an exodus of...health workers abroad before the Ebola crises, and the outbreaks led some of the remaining West African health workers to their untimely deaths," he writes. "There is no way a society can survive with reduced numbers of qualified doctors and such a colossal disease as Ebola," he continues. "It is no wonder that it did not take an eye's blink before Ebola outran the capacity of the West African medical team."

Ikuomola's book was introduced in an African-themed ceremony at University of Hawai'i (UH) on August 27, 2015. Ikuomola is a researcher in the UH Cancer Center and a PhD candidate at the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

The ceremony also marked the beginning of a fundraising drive to send Dr. Ikuomola back to West Africa, with copies of his book in hand to distribute free of charge to physicians and traditional healers in the region. Ikuomola's most fervent desire is to bring evidence-based medicine and native healers together in Africa as allies to improve public health in the region.

From the publisher:

Dr. Felix I. Ikuomola, born in Ugbo, Nigeria, earned his medical degree

at O. A. U., Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and is a candidate for two other advanced degrees in clinical research (UH) and surgical sciences (RCSEd/Edin). Named Liberia's doctor of the year in 2006, he has practiced medicine and surgery in Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia.

The Ebola Virus and West Africa: Medical and Sociocultural Aspects provides a compact summary of the Ebola virus, outlining its nature, history, epidemiology, and methods of treatment. In addition, the work examines the context of the disease's outbreak by describing the people, politics, and policies in West Africa before, during, and after the recent outbreak. Finally, chapters summarize and explore the ethical issues that arise in pursuing treatments and discuss methods for improving control and prevention of additional outbreaks.

Dr. Felix I. Ikuomola, a medical doctor who is pursuing additional advanced degrees in clinical research (UH) and surgical sciences (Rcsed/Edin), brings to bear his practice of medicine and surgery in Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia and his direct knowledge of the cultural practices and factors at play in the countries of West Africa to ground the presentation in *The Ebola Virus and West Africa* in the realities of the current situation in the region.

The Ebola Virus and West Africa: Medical and Sociocultural Aspects will provide a highly organized, comprehensive, and insightful treatment of this virulent disease and its sociocultural elements to people with medical backgrounds and to individuals desiring to understand more comprehensively the impact of this disease on West Africa. In either case, time spent with *The Ebola Virus and West Africa* will give you the background and analysis you need to respond intelligently to the challenges the virus presents to an increasingly globalized culture.

Provided by University of Hawaii Cancer Center

Citation: Ebola cannot be conquered without understanding Africa's culture, politics and poverty (2015, September 30) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-09-ebola-conquered-africa-culture-politics.html>

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