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KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTITIONERS ON ZOO NOTIC DISEASES IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Zoonotic diseases are a major cause of morbidity and mortality which has resulted in the death of over 14 million people annually of global population (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2003; Tekki, Nwosu, and Okewole, 2013). Beside morbidity and mortality, zoonotic diseases have other negative consequences such as restrictions in international trade and travels. Similarly, in countries with limited resources where zoonotic diseases are high, the health systems are usually overstretched (Jaffry, Ali, Rasool, Raza, and Gill, 2009; Katare and Kumar, 2010).

To reduce the adverse effects of zoonotic diseases, several studies have been conducted; Kujul, Banyigyi, Abechi and Moses (2010); Ehizibolo, Ehizibolo, Ehizibolo, Sugun, and Idachaba (2011); Aiyedun and Olugasa (2012); Tekki *et al.* (2013). In spite of these studies, the incidence of zoonotic diseases still persists. To advance in the control of zoonotic diseases, scholars have stressed the need for collaborative efforts across veterinary, medical and environmental health professionals (Joshi, 2008; Ehizibolo *et al.*, 2011; Karshima, 2012). One-way collaborative effort is made possible is through multidisciplinary knowledge sharing among various health professionals, specifically veterinary, medical and environmental health professionals. This study explores multidisciplinary knowledge sharing among public health professionals in managing zoonotic diseases in Plateau State.

To achieve the objective of this study, five research questions were raised to include: What is the perception of public health professionals about knowledge sharing in managing zoonotic diseases? What is the absorptive capacity of health professionals in managing zoonotic diseases? (To determine the absorptive capacity of public health professionals in managing zoonotic diseases; the following sub question was asked: How do Public health professionals acquire external knowledge in managing zoonotic disease?). What factors motivate public health professionals to share knowledge in managing zoonotic diseases? What factors limit knowledge sharing of public health professionals in managing zoonotic diseases? How do the constructs of social exchange theory explain the perception of public health professionals about knowledge sharing in managing zoonotic disease? Social Exchange Theory provided the theoretical framework for the study.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research method. Choosing a qualitative approach is appropriate when emphasis is on describing, understanding, and explaining complex phenomena (Yin, 2004). The study was conducted in a natural setting as it attempts to gain an in-depth understanding of the perception of public health professionals about multidisciplinary knowledge sharing in managing zoonotic diseases. This study adopted semi- structured interview and focus group discussion (FGD) for data collection.

Data analysis

Data in the form of phrases and sentences were collected through semi-structured interview from the participants of this study. The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. The audio recordings were then transcribed. All transcripts of the interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Findings revealed positive perception about knowledge sharing among public health professionals in managing zoonotic diseases as follows; Effective

management, Knowledge gaps exist, Conform to the notion of “One Health Initiative”, Save humans lives. Also, the study found that; Public health professionals acquire external knowledge in managing zoonotic disease through multidisciplinary networks and Professional associations; Attending Seminars, Workshops, Symposia and Conferences; Consulting books, journals, and internet databases and During work routines and processes. Findings also revealed factors that motivate public health professionals to share knowledge in managing zoonotic diseases in Plateau state to include: Forum to share knowledge; Adequate Funding; Professional Ethics; Good Policy guidelines; and Organizational support. Similarly, Factors that limit knowledge sharing among Public health professionals in managing zoonotic diseases in Plateau state are: Professional dichotomy; Negative traits; Mono-disciplinary training; Lack of policy; Lack of funds; and Leadership Issues. The study found that there is a convergence between the two constructs of social exchange theory “reciprocity” and “trust” and the perception of public health professionals about knowledge sharing in managing zoonotic diseases.

Discussion

The perception of public health professional about knowledge sharing is positive. This positive perception is rooted in the desire of public health professionals to reduce the negative impact of these diseases in humans in terms of morbidity and mortality. There is no doubt that the positive perception of public health professionals’ about multidisciplinary knowledge sharing will facilitate the absorption of external knowledge. Acquiring knowledge from other public health professionals will fill the knowledge gaps that exist and also increase the efficiency in managing zoonotic diseases. The knowledge gaps that exist in managing zoonotic diseases occurs between what health professionals know about zoonotic diseases within the context of their professional training and what they need to know about zoonotic diseases from other public health professionals. Therefore, acquiring knowledge from other public health professionals to fill this gap is about incorporating knowledge which a

professionals lacks but is identified to be critically important for the advancement of the professional and the profession (Kristensen, Nymann and Konradsen 2016).

The approach to multidisciplinary knowledge sharing will be positive when factors that motivate public health professionals share knowledge are adequately in place (Dessie, 2017). However, factors limiting multidisciplinary knowledge sharing constitutes major setback which has led to increase in human and economic losses (Lee and Hong (2014).

Conclusion

The management of diseases that are of public health importance will require beside other things; Well-trained public health professionals at all levels and availability of public health infrastructures. However, the effective management of zoonotic diseases will also depend on the attention paid on multidisciplinary knowledge sharing among Public Health Professionals.

Recommendation

Stakeholders should take advantage of the positive perception of public health professionals by strengthening the capacities in the human and animal health sectors and also create the mechanism necessary to share knowledge among public health professionals in order to respond to emerging health threats of zoonotic diseases efficiently.

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