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The world has witnessed several viral outbreaks in recent years such as the covid-19 pandemic, monkeypox and tomato flu. These have caused a devastating effect on the communities that experience the outbreaks. As a result of these, being informed about diseases has become critical to preventing and curbing the spread of the diseases in communities, especially in academia. Health science libraries and librarians can serve vital informational roles in the fight toward eradicating and preventing future outbreaks. This paper presents the reasons and how health science librarians can achieve those important roles.

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Health Sciences Libraries As Universities Information Hub in Times of Health Emergencies: Emergence of Covid-19, MonkeyPox and Tomato Flu

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ABSTRACT

The world has witnessed several viral outbreaks in recent years such as the covid-19 pandemic, monkeypox and tomato flu. These have caused a devastating effect on the communities that experience the outbreaks. As a result of these, being informed about diseases has become critical to preventing and curbing the spread of the diseases in communities, especially in academia. Health science libraries and librarians can serve vital informational roles in the fight toward eradicating and preventing future outbreaks. This paper presents the reasons and how health science librarians can achieve those important roles.

Keywords: Covid-19, MonkeyPox, Tomato Flu

INTRODUCTION

Viral and deadly diseases are becoming the new normal in society. The emergence of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (sars-cov-2) that can range from asymptomatic to severe respiratory illness, pneumonia and death has awoken many to the awful consequences when measures are not put in place to deter the rise of deadly diseases(adetayo, sanni, and aborisade 2021). As a result, more than 6 million lives were lost (world health organization 2022). The pandemic also had economic and psychological consequences due to control measures such as closures of public and commercial areas via lockdown which affected business operations of many (adetayo, williams-ilemobola, and asiru 2022).

To make the matter worst, just as covid-19 was waning, reports were made that another viral outbreak called monkeypox was beginning to spread in 13 countries. About 42, 954 people have already been infected by it around the world as of August 22, 2022. This has also led to the death of 12 people (CDC 2022b). Monkeypox is a zoonotic viral disease caused by a double-strand

enclosed DNA virus from the Poxviridae family, which is part of the Orthopoxvirus genus. MonkeyPox was first documented in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While monkeypox is yet to be fully resolved, reports have been made that India is now experiencing Tomato Flu, a virus-borne disease with symptoms comparable to Covid-19 but is unrelated to SARS COV-2. This disease was discovered in the Kollam region of Kerala. (Zaidi 2022) with 82 cases reported. This tomato flu got its name from the appearance of red and painful blisters all over the body that eventually develops to the size of a tomato. These blisters mimic those observed in children infected with the monkeypox virus.

Due to the recurring episodes of viral diseases, the time has now come for health science librarians to step up their games by providing informational support to the institutions they serve to deter or curb the spread of these viruses on their campuses.

NEED FOR HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANS IN HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Health sciences librarians are key to the measures to deter or curb the spread of viral diseases. This is because of the skillsets they possess which combine the understanding of health and management of information. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there were lockdowns in various places around the world which meant that schools had to shut down also, thereby affecting the calendars of many schools that were not able to go completely online due to technological difficulties. This was especially true in many African countries. In Nigeria, most schools did not operate for months, many tried to adopt online mediums to continue their academic session but some were unsuccessful (Adetayo, Komolafe, and Olalere 2022). After the covid-19 pandemic was in decline in 2021, schools started reopening but measures such as masking, social distancing and hand washing were adopted, which often were not followed by many. One of the reasons for this was that many people did not physically see anyone they know die from the virus. Also, the widespread misinformation about covid-19 led many to disregard the measures.

As other viruses continue to emerge, it becomes imperative for campus management to harness the skills of health science librarians in helping the campus communities to be well informed before, during or after health emergencies. This would require health science librarians to adopt not just physical means but also technological means to reach many young people who are heavy consumers of technology initiatives such as social media. This incorporation of health science librarians could be the tool that would solve current and deter future health emergencies from having the colossal impact that covid-19 had on the educational system.

HEALTH SCIENCE LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS' ROLES

Health science libraries and librarians can take a pivoted role in deterring, curbing and solving the spread of diseases on campuses. The health science libraries should be stocked with books that address various viral diseases. Efforts should also be made to provide access to credible online resources that address past and current pandemics/diseases.

Determent – Prevention is better than cure! This has been a popular statement in the health discipline. While this is true, it is a broad statement that does not go to specifics about how to prevent each disease that is encountered daily. For instance, monkeypox is primarily transmitted through bodily fluids, blood, aerosol, or infected lesions. However, many students spent much of their time on social media making social connections. Most probably do not go searching for information about every single disease. Some may not know that to prevent zoonotic transmission, animal management or interaction with unvaccinated animals, such as rats and primates, is critical. Also, sick or dead animals should be avoided, and any things they come into contact with should be discarded promptly. Furthermore, they may not be aware that monkeypox can occur through close human-to-human contact or respiratory secretions (Farahat et al. 2022). This is where health science librarians become vital. Health science librarians must be intentional in regularly sharing preventive measures for different diseases with students. They can incorporate these into their information literacy programmes by organizing health seminars, use of library boards, selective dissemination of information, library websites, and social media platforms among others. They need to educate the campus community that avoidance of infected human contact, sharing eating utensils, clothing, or bedding materials. and good hand hygiene are recommended for prevention. To date, monkeypox has no definitive vaccination or medicine; it is treated as a syndrome. Nonetheless, in certain places, such as the United States, a licensed vaccination called JYNNEOS® has been recommended (Rao et al. 2022). These are vital information students and teachers should be aware of. They should also know that an emerging disease called tomato flu is highly contagious and spread through contact and so far, no vaccine is available for the virus.

Curbing- Despite preventive measures, diseases spread at times. In this situation, all that can be done is to limit its impact on the campus. However, if students are not aware of the symptoms of these diseases, they may not be able to act quickly to avoid being infected. For instance, monkeypox symptoms include a headache, fever, and fatigue, followed by lymphadenopathy and a rash. The rash generally begins on the face and spreads to other regions of the body in a centrifugal pattern (CDC 2022a). Likewise, the predominant symptoms of tomato flu in children are similar to those of chikungunya, which include high fever, rashes, and severe joint pain(da Cunha and Trinta 2017). Other symptoms include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, dehydration, joint swelling, body pains, and frequent influenza-like symptoms, which are similar to those seen in dengue (Hasan et al. 2016). These are some information students would need to know for the virus to be curbed on campuses with cases.

Aside from efforts made by campus management and medical personnel, health science librarians can assist in curbing the spread of the virus by making the campus community informed.

As a result, health science librarians would need to play the role of health reference librarians in which they are always available through phone calls, chats or reference desk to answer users' inquiries about how to prevent students from contracting viral diseases. The health best practices should also be circulated through all library platforms. For instance, students need to know that it is critical to wash hands with soap or alcohol-based hand sanitisers following contact with suspected cases of monkeypox. Also, when caring for patients afflicted with the virus, it is highly advantageous to utilize personal protective equipment. Depending on the severity of their symptoms, infected people must be isolated at home. This also goes for tomato Flu, which requires the isolation of infected persons. Furthermore, to prevent the transmission of the tomato flu, utensils, clothing, and other objects used by sick people must be sanitized. Experts also recommend rest, plenty of drinks, and a hot water sponge to relieve discomfort and rashes (Mint 2022).

Information First Aid – Those that have contacted the disease should not be left out. At times, infected people would not want to speak up, since they feel they may be marginalised. Therefore, they may need to inquire about information about it from trusted sources. Librarians being one of the most trusted sources of information (Woldetsadik 2021) could make themselves available to give the necessary assistance. This is what I tagged as 'information first aid'. Health science librarians are not doctors and they don't have the license to give therapeutic advice. However, health science librarians can recommend trusted sources where they can find answers. They can also link them to medical personnel from the campus hospital.

Techno-Friendly Health Science Librarians

Information has become easy to get nowadays. With a click of a button, one can easily get the required information. However, the internet is filled with a lot of misinformation and disinformation. If one is not careful, misinformation may be taken as fact. Health science librarians need to become savvy in the use of the internet to sort facts from fiction. This will become helpful in their role as information first aider. They would need to have the latest facts about the health emergencies since updates are constantly developing in the case of a new strain of the disease.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of health science librarians in preventing the spread of future viral diseases and curbing ongoing multiple viral diseases plaguing the world cannot be overemphasized. Health science librarians are not only needed but crucial to protecting academic communities from the deadly impact of diseases on their health and achieving their academic goals. As a result, it is recommended that health science librarians are equipped with the necessary resources and tools to meet the information demands of the academic communities.

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Adebowale Jeremy Adetayo is an academic staff of Adeleke University. His research interest is Information Science, Health Information Management, and Library Science. He has published many articles in reputable journals and currently working on projects relating to pandemics, vaccines and virtual learning. He has a Ph.D in library and information science.