

Ethnomedical and ethnobotanical investigations on the response capacities of guinean traditional health practioners in the management of outbreaks of infectious diseases: The case of the *Ebola virus* epidemic

A M Balde

Gamal Abdel Nasser University of Conakry, Guinea

Like many other emerging diseases, the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa illustrated the crucial role of the ecological, social, political and economic context within which diseases emerge. In the infected areas, the threat of Ebola has limited the ability of local health-care systems to provide standard care, leaving people with Ebola or non-Ebola Virus Disease-related health disorders without necessary care. Moreover, the mistrust towards the official authorities along with the fear of the disease prevents a number of patients to consult the conventional health care centers. Consequently, millions of Guinean people remained at risk of contamination. For these, traditional medicine has been continued to be the first and most important source of medicinal solace when illness strikes health. While international efforts focus on new vaccines, medicines and diagnostics, no coherent national or international approach exists to integrate the potential of the traditional health practitioners (THPs) in the management of infectious diseases epidemics. In spite of its social importance, traditional medicine continues to be largely disregarded in health development planning. An ethnomedical survey conducted in the 4 main Guinean regions led to the contacts of a total of 113 traditional health practioners and the collection of 54 plant species from which 44 identified belonging to 26 families. The traditional treatment of the main symptoms was based on 47 vegetal recipes which were focused on the treatment of diarrhea (22 recipes), fever (22 recipes), vomiting (2 recipes), external antiseptic (2 recipes), hemorrhagic syndrome (2 recipes), convulsion and dysentery (one recipe each). Literature data on the 12 most cited plant species tends to corroborate their traditional use and to highlight their pharmacological potential. Upon the above considerations and taking into account traditional health practitioners have always played a central role in the medical management of their community and tend to be the entry point for care in many African communities, particularly in remote rural areas, it is worth to document all available knowledge on the traditional management of EVD-like symptoms in order to evaluate systematically the anti-Ebola potential of Guinean plant species.

Biography

My academic evolution was realized at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Conakry, Guinea (1968-1973; PharmD in 1973), the Institute of Pharmacy (Free University of Brussels, Belgium ;1983-1986), the Tropical Medicine Institute of Antwerp, Belgium (1985-1987), the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Antwerp, Belgium (1986-1991; PhD in 1990). I've been the chief of the department of pharmacy (University of Conakry) from 1998 to 2010 and I'm the General Manager of the Research and Valorization Center on Medicinal Plants (Dubreka) since 2000. As a full professor, I'm teaching pharmacognosy, ethnopharmacology and phytochemistry to students of pharmacy, biology and chemistry in the Guinean universities.

bmalieu2002@yahoo.fr

Notes: