

Perception and Treatment Seeking Behavior for Malaria in Rural Nigeria: Implications for Control

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ABSTRACT The treatment seeking behaviour and perceptions of cause of malaria amongst caregivers of children under-five living in rural Nigeria, was studied using a cross sectional survey conducted in Ugwuogo- Nike, a rural community in south-east Nigeria, between November 2001 and April 2002. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed using structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. Two hundred and seventy-five out of the 300 care givers were mothers and majority (60.7%) reported malaria to be a common illness. Heat from the sun was the most popularly reported cause of malaria (49.3%). Correct knowledge of mosquitoes causing malaria varied significantly with the level of education.. Most of the interviewed caregivers were familiar with signs and symptoms of malaria and self treatment with inappropriate doses of chloroquine was used by the majority (83.7%) while drug sellers were their most (52.3%) popular source of care. Poor utilization of formal health facilities was noted to be due to cost and absence of health personnel. The most popular treatment for severe malaria by caretakers was herbal remedies. Although some reasonable knowledge of the symptoms of malaria was found, there is still need for intervention measures directed towards correcting misconceptions about the cause of malaria and improving treatment seeking behavior. It is recommended that appropriate home management with early recognition of symptoms and features of severe illness, correct use of effective anti-malaria drugs and prompt referral of severe cases should be promoted since majority resort to self-treatment.