

**Title: COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN MILITARY VETERANS USING ISTAR-ALIGNED (INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE, TARGET ACQUISITION, RECONNAISSANCE) APPROACH**

Congress Theme: "The Battle Against Infection and Phage Therapy"

Author: "Dr. Ojochide Cyril AKAGWU"

Institution: "University of Abuja Teaching Hospital, Gwagwalada-Abuja, Nigeria; Defence Health Maintenance Ltd [Ministry of Defence], Nigeria"

**Summary**

**INTRODUCTION**

Military veterans are a rich repository of knowledge and expertise to defence forces worldwide. Epidemiological transitions with rising burden of non-communicable diseases and COVID-19 associated health system and social disruptions had veterans at great risk of complications and mortality. This study assessed the COVID-19 related burden of disease in the Nigerian military veteran population during 60 days of national COVID-19 lockdown. Also presented is the methodological approach towards improved situational awareness deployed during this unprecedented time in human history.

**METHODS**

An ISTAR-aligned approach was employed to track all 'requests for assistance' (RfA) by military veterans via 4-hourly monitoring of 'Fee-for Service' (FFS) approvals issued Nationwide. Risk stratification utilized 6 parameters; current health complains (higher score if COVID-19 related), demographic data, pre-existing disease, location, medevac-indicated, and need for high-end health services. Similar definition was applied to RfAs (Target Acquisition) from non-military or out-of-network hospitals with revisions in line with (reconnaissance) objectives (see Figure).

**RESULTS**

Veterans had a 3-fold proportional increase in 'requests for assistance' when compared with serving military personnel. 23.9% were for COVID-19 indicated symptoms and diagnoses (see Table). This finding was noted to be statistically significant (mean- 702; SD- 32.7) when compared with 3 preceding years. Deaths recorded were of non-COVID aetiology.

**CONCLUSION**

Direct and indirect COVID-19 pandemic effects on the Nigerian health system increased the health needs of all citizens. Military veterans needed care three times more when compared to the younger active service population. Compared with the civilian population, evidence exists for the effectiveness of the ISTAR-aligned approach to Veteran Health Maintenance from greater situational awareness in health managers as no COVID-19 death was recorded during the study period.