

## NEWS FROM THE JOINT WEST AFRICA RESEARCH GROUP

### **JWARG AND USG PARTNERS PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN NIGERIA LASSA OUTBREAK**

The Joint West Africa Research Group (JWARG) is coordinating with the CDC, USAID and the State Department to respond to a request for outbreak assistance from the Nigerian Ministry of Defence.

Current assistance includes the effort to acquire 12,000 sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from WHO stockpiles for delivery to clinical sites in the Lassa belt to cover estimated need through June. JWARG is providing laboratory reagents for diagnostics and viral genome sequencing to permit molecular epidemiologic investigations.

JWARG partners from the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) have provided additional support through GEIS-funded Lassa diagnostic assays brought to the 68th Nigerian Army Reference

Hospital. In addition to much needed supplies, staff from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and the USAMRIID diagnostics team traveled to Lagos in March to augment diagnostic capability at the 68th. JWARG partners at Redeemer's University, with support from the Broad Institute, are conducting detailed viral sequencing analysis to further characterize the outbreak.

Lassa fever is a viral hemorrhagic fever that is transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent waste. The WHO reports 1,706 suspected cases and close to 100 deaths in Nigeria between January and April. A national Lassa fever Emergency Operations Centre was activated in Abuja and continues to coordinate response activities in collaboration with WHO and other partners.

### **STUDY OF SEVERE INFECTIOUS DISEASES ACTIVATED IN LIBERIA**

In March, JWARG activated a study designed to identify and characterize cases of suspected severe infectious disease at the Armed Forces of Liberia Camp EBK clinic in Monrovia. Study laboratory activities are also centered at the Liberian Institute for Biomedical Research campus of the National Public Health Institute of Liberia.

This multi-site protocol led by the U.S. Military HIV Research Program opened in Nigeria late last year, and research activity will expand into Ghana in the coming months.

The study enrolls adult volunteers who present to clinics as severely ill with a suspected infectious source. In addition to receiving care, they will be asked to provide samples for laboratory analysis and to complete a brief questionnaire that captures basic clinical, demographic and exposure data.

Several acute infectious diseases are endemic to West Africa, including malaria, yellow fever and Lassa fever. Others like Ebola virus have caused outbreaks in the region.

By characterizing emerging cases, researchers will be able to investigate patterns of illness, associated exposures and patient outcomes. Study data further informs infectious disease countermeasure development.



*Clinicians receive phlebotomy training at Camp EBK in Liberia.*

## NEWS FROM THE JOINT WEST AFRICA RESEARCH GROUP

### JWARG PRESENTS AT ANNUAL ASTMH MEETING

In November JWARG conducted a symposium at the annual meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in Baltimore. The symposium emphasized research readiness and highlighted military and civilian researchers collaborating to prepare for future infectious disease outbreaks. Partners from West Africa presented lessons learned in the first year of the JWARG initiative, and showed how the program is improving biopreparedness by strengthening research capabilities in West Africa.



### PHEBE HOSPITAL PREPARES TO BEGIN SEPSIS PROTOCOL

The Austere environments Consortium for Enhanced Sepsis Outcomes (ACESO) team recently traveled to Liberia to continue site preparations for their observational sepsis protocol at Phebe Hospital, set to kick off this spring.

clinical microbiology to Liberia. Phebe Hospital microbiology technicians continue to make progress towards this goal by demonstrating increased proficiency for bacterial identification and antibiotic sensitivity testing.

The ACESO team has been working closely with the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) to reintroduce



ACESO International Program Scientist Dr. Josh Chenoweth, ASM Fellow Dr. Jana Broadhurst and Phebe technician Joseph Sanjue discuss lab activities at Phebe Hospital during the March site visit.



ACESO team member, Dr. Dominic Awuah, of KATH, presented the poster entitled, "Sepsis in Kumasi, Ghana -Bacterial Etiologies and Antibiotic Sensitivities" at the ASTMH West Africa conference held in Bamako, Mali in February. Dr. Awuah received third place for his poster presentation.

