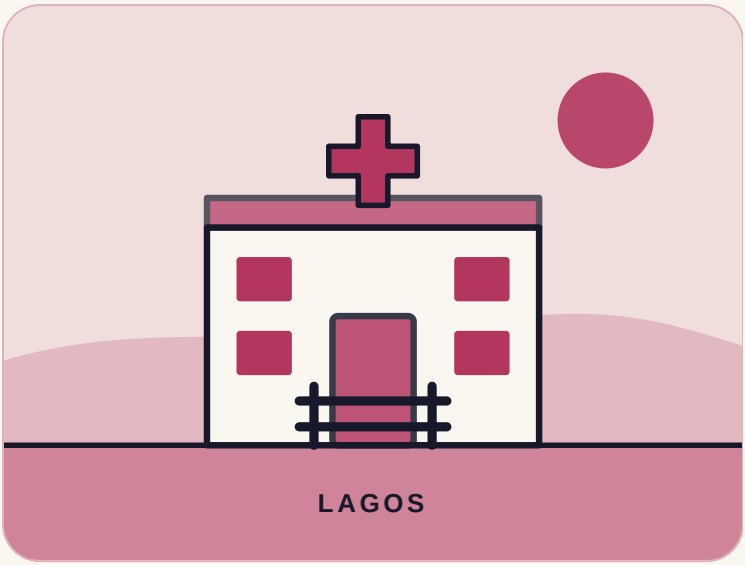

NIGERIA

The doctor who refused to open the door

In 2014, a Lagos doctor kept a sick traveller in hospital against heavy pressure. It helped stop Ebola in Nigeria.

WHERE	Lagos
WHO	Dr. Ameyo Stella Adadevoh, a Lagos doctor who helped stop Ebola in Nigeria
WHEN	2014

4 min read

CHAPTER ONE

The story

In July 2014, Ebola was spreading fast in West Africa. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, had never had a case. Then a very sick traveller from Liberia collapsed at the airport in Lagos, the biggest city in Africa. He was rushed to First Consultant Hospital.

Dr. Ameyo Adadevoh was a senior doctor there. She had worked in medicine for more than 30 years. In 2012, she had been the first to warn Nigeria's authorities about swine flu. At first, staff treated him for malaria. He got worse. Adadevoh began to suspect Ebola, a deadly virus that spreads through body fluids. No one at the hospital had ever seen a case.

The patient said he had not been near anyone with Ebola. He demanded to leave. The Liberian ambassador phoned the hospital and threatened legal action. Adadevoh would not let him go.

Standing firm

She ordered a test and kept him in his room. Staff had little protective gear. She put up a barrier outside his door. At that time, Lagos's public hospitals were short of doctors because of a strike. A virus loose in a city of 21 million could be a disaster.

The test was positive. Health officials quickly traced 898 people who might be at risk. The patient died on 25 July.

> **For the greater public good.**
>
> DR. AMEYO ADADEVOH, ON WHY SHE WOULD NOT RELEASE THE PATIENT, AS REPORTED BY WIKIPEDIA

898

people traced after the first case

19

people infected in Nigeria, most of them health workers

42

days with no new cases before Nigeria was declared free

A price paid

Staff who had been near the patient checked their own temperature for 21 days. An empty building became a small quarantine unit. When workers fell ill, they told the authorities and went in.

Adadevoh caught Ebola herself. She tested positive on 4 August. She died on 19 August 2014, aged 57.

In the end, 19 people were infected in Nigeria, and seven died, CBC reports. On 20 October 2014, the World Health Organization said Nigeria was free of Ebola. In nearby Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, thousands died.

How it unfolded

- **2012** Adadevoh is the first to alert Nigeria's authorities to swine flu (H1N1).
- **Jul** A traveller with Ebola arrives in Lagos. She keeps him in hospital.
- **Aug** She catches Ebola and dies on 19 August.
- **Oct** The WHO declares Nigeria free of Ebola on 20 October.

CHAPTER TWO

What makes it special

The country had never seen Ebola before. She trusted her judgement and tested anyway.

She was one of many. Contact tracers and staff who quarantined themselves made the difference too.

OUR TAKE

One doctor's refusal to open a door gave a whole city time to prepare.

CHAPTER THREE

What we can learn

1. ### Check what your gut tells you

   She trusted her experience, then ordered a test.

   Try this: When you feel something is wrong, find a simple way to check it.

2 Hold firm under pressure

An ambassador threatened legal action. She still would not release the patient.

Try this: Write down one decision where you must stay firm. Say why.

3 Protect others first

Staff who were exposed told the authorities and went into quarantine.

Try this: If you may have harmed someone by mistake, tell them early.

4 Start with what you have

She had little protective gear, so she built a barrier and began.

Try this: Do the first useful step you can today, with what you already have.

ONE THOUGHT TO TAKE AWAY

Sometimes courage is simply keeping a door shut.

Sources

CBC
Health-care workers and everyday heroism: A case study in curbing disease (2020)

Face2face Africa
Meet the woman who risked her life to save Nigeria from an Ebola epidemic in 2014 (2018)

Wikipedia
Ameyo Adadevoh

Fact-check note: The sources agree on the main story and differ on details. The traveller: CBC calls him an American-Liberian lawyer; Face2face Africa calls him a Liberian civil servant; the story says only “a very sick traveller from Liberia” and does not name him. The patient arrived on 20 July 2014 and died on 25 July (CBC). Adadevoh’s role: CBC calls her the hospital’s chief physician; Wikipedia calls her lead consultant physician and endocrinologist and says she worked at the hospital for 21 years; the story says “a senior doctor”. That no one at the hospital had seen Ebola before is from CBC. More than 30 years in medicine and the 2012 swine flu (H1N1) warning are from CBC; Wikipedia also records the warning. How firm she was: CBC says the Liberian ambassador accused the hospital of kidnapping and threatened legal action, and that she stood firm; Wikipedia adds the wooden barricade outside his door and quotes “for the greater public good” as her reason, citing another source; the story uses that phrase as a short quote and credits it to Wikipedia. The doctors’ strike and the size of Lagos (21 million) are from CBC. Contact tracing of 898 people, the 21-day temperature checks and the quarantine unit are from CBC. Her own illness: positive on 4 August (Wikipedia); died 19 August 2014 aged 57 (Wikipedia, CBC, Face2face Africa). Total cases: CBC says 19 people were infected, most of them health workers, and seven died; Face2face Africa says seven deaths were recorded; other reports give 20 cases and eight deaths, which includes the first patient; the story uses CBC’s 19 and seven. “Africa’s most populous country” is from Face2face Africa. Nigeria was declared free of Ebola on 20 October 2014 after 42 days with no new cases (CBC; Wikipedia and Face2face Africa give the date). The WHO’s own page could not be opened. “Thousands died” in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is from CBC. The pin shows Lagos. Lines marked "Our take" are interpretation. Everything else comes from the sources above.