Enabling Patient Safety Research In Nigeria: The Role Of Law In Balancing Accountability With A No-Blame Approach

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Patient safety concerns constitute a serious public health threat to the entire world. Research into the scope of the problem and the primary contributing factors leading to patient harm is critical for expanding the world's body of knowledge about patient safety, devising effective and efficient solutions for building safer health systems, and improving patient safety. Although patient safety research has enormous potential for improving patient safety and health care quality, available literature on patient safety in Nigeria are few indicating a dearth of patient safety research in the country.

While patient safety advocates recommends a no-blame approach, patient safety research often involves the systematic collection of data regarding care, previous medical errors, and adverse events, giving healthcare practitioners the impression that the research is aimed at critiquing or detecting their mistakes, making them averse to participating effectively in patient safety research or activity. There is also concern that a no-blame approach to patient safety research or activity may reduce the likelihood of identifying underperforming healthcare practitioners or institutions.

To determine the position of the law on accountability and adopting a no-blame approach to address patient safety concerns, a review of existing Nigerian laws and regulations on patient safety, as well as health research, was conducted. The laws and regulations were discovered by searching dedicated websites and archive materials. Text analysis was also performed on secondary resources obtained from databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, Jstor, ScienceDirect, and HeinOnline.

With a myriad of systemic issues leading to patient safety incidents and a climate that leans more toward blaming individuals by responding through compensation, deterrence, and punishment in negligence, criminal law, or professional disciplinary actions rather than addressing the wider systemic issues, a balance between accountability and a no-blame approach is required to enable patient safety research in the country. Although it is argued that the law should shift its emphasis from addressing individual failings to addressing systemic issues in order to encourage healthcare practitioners involved in patient safety research, misconduct should not be tolerated and accountability should not be jeopardized.