

Poor teamwork, recurrent strikes and the need for volunteer work by health workers in Nigeria

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Public hospitals are equipped and health workers are employed to serve patients. Without patients, there will be no need for hospitals and health workers. Recent events in Nigeria however have made the patient to receive less than optimal services from public hospitals and health workers.

Team work in public hospitals is currently at an all time low. The health workers are embroiled in a supremacy battle with each other. All the professional groups pledge their allegiance to their various unions which are projecting the image of being superior or at par with each other. This also affects service. Ward rounds are no longer what they used to be as they are conducted by separate professional groups at different times. The laboratories are locked down by infighting among the various health workers. The list goes on. As there is no unity of purpose, the quality of health care has dramatically fallen. As the saying goes

“When two elephants are fighting, the grass suffers”. The current situation in public hospitals in Nigeria is akin to several elephants fighting and the patients are suffering. Patients are left with no choice than to seek care in private hospitals or even travel abroad for those that can afford. To make matters even more complicated, strike actions have become the order of the day. As one professional union goes on strike and then calls it off, another union starts its own. The clinical care of patients is thus disrupted. The strikes are been called for due to several reasons but it mainly revolves around the welfare of the different professional unions. The supervising government agencies also fail in their promises or responsibilities of providing all the necessary welfare packages. The situation is also worsened by shortfall in government revenue and the general economic down turn being experienced in Nigeria.

The truth is that health workers need each other for optimum service to the patient. All the health workers are important for optimum service delivery. If the theater is not cleaned by the cleaner, the surgeon cannot operate. The pharmacist needs the laboratory while the doctor needs the physiotherapist to complete his treatment. If the nurse cooperates with the doctor, the patient is better taken care of and so on. As rightly stated in the paper in this edition by Aliyu AD, TEAM means Together Each Achieves More.¹ He has described other details about team work in Islam and how we can do more to work with each other using Islamic principles for better care of our patients. Islamic organizations such as IMAN have a great role in reminding health workers that Allah (SWT) will ask them to account for all their actions including how they provided care to their patients. The current state of recurrent strikes is most undesirable for optimum patient care. The government should also provide all the necessary welfare packages that will enable the health workers perform their duties optimally. The health workers should also consider the economic realities and make their requests in tandem with the socio economic status of the nation. However, one thing stands clearly when it comes to service

to our patients. No health worker can be fully paid in commensurate to the service he renders to patients. Health workers should expect their reward from Allah (SWT). This is fundamental and any one choosing a health related career needs to be aware of this ab initio.

Several papers in this edition have awakened the need for health workers in Nigeria to do more volunteer work without expecting any monetary reward. The paper by Abiola MO reminded us that Nigeria has the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa. On a global scale, Nigeria, having a total of 3.3 million IDPs, is only ranked behind Syria with 6.5 million IDPs and Colombia with 5.7 million IDPs – women and children being the highest hit.² His paper looked at the educational needs of the IDPs but also reminded us of their health needs. We have watched several times on TV, efforts by international organizations to raise funds to help refugees. We do not appear to be doing much to help our IDPs. We as health workers should more volunteer work and commit our time, resources and expertise to reduce the burden of IDPs in Nigeria. IMAN has a role in organizing these services as described in the paper by Ismail S.

This edition of the journal is very rich. I wish you a happy reading.

References

1. Maxwell JC. The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace them and empower your team. Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001.
2. United Nations. Guiding principles on internal displacement, introduction, 1998: para. 2.