

ASSESSMENT OF THE COMPLIANCE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AMONG RADIOGRAPHERS IN NORTH EASTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Ethics is concerned with justice, rights; respect background is not deficit of human dignity, autonomy of the individual and respect of the community. Medical ethics is a set of moral values and principles of conduct for professionals working with patients.

OBJECTIVE: To determine the compliance to professional ethics among radiographers in North Eastern Nigeria.

METHODS: A prospective cross-sectional survey targeted at radiographers practicing in different hospitals within the North East Nigeria which include 58 radiograph requisition compiled questionnaire that sought information. The data collection instrument was a twenty-three-item self-completion questionnaire issued to the radiographers by post, 51 were filled out and returned within the period of three months, giving a response rate of 88%. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentages and frequencies, using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 16.0.

RESULTS: Majority of the respondents were males with 72.5% (n=37) and 27.5% (n=14) where females. More than half of the respondents 58.8% (n=30) had a Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.) degree in Medical Radiography, none had M.Sc or PhD. About 31.4%, (n=16) were from Borno State, 25.5% (n=13) from Gombe State, Bauchi State 21.6% (n=11), Adamawa State 9.8% (n=5), Taraba State 9.8%, (n=5) and Yobe State 2.0% (n=1). More than two third of the respondents 82.4% (n=42) had no incidence of litigation against any radiographer in their centers and 74.5% (n=38) sought patients consent before carrying out their examinations.

CONCLUSION: There is high level of compliance to professional ethics among radiographers in the studied area. However there is still room for improvement in certain areas like participation in Continued Professional Development programs, role advancement and role development programs in radiography.

KEYWORDS: Ethics, Radiographer, Litigation, Patient, Radiography.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is defined as a code of moral principles derived from a system of values and beliefs, concerned with rights and obligations¹. Ethics is considered as the effort to find justifiable grounds for distinguishing what is right or wrong in human actions and ways of life. Ethics incorporates social dimensions; it is concerned with justice, rights, respect of human dignity, autonomy of the individual and respect of the community². Medical ethics is a set of moral values and principles of conduct for professionals working with patients (Radiographers Registration Board of Nigeria (RRBN)³

A profession is characterized by a specialized body of knowledge that its members must teach and expand, by a code of ethics and a duty of service that put patient care above self-interest, and by the privilege of self-regulation granted by society⁴. The conceptualization of professional identity in terms of radiography perception focuses on their preferred role content and perception of the profession. Professional identity define values and beliefs that guide the radiographers thinking, actions and interaction⁵.

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Thus as a member of the radiography workforce you must practice in a safe and competent manner within the scope of practice based on education, competency, knowledge, extent of experience and registration (SCoR)⁶. The Radiographer (Medical Imaging Scientist) is a health professional qualified in the use of ionizing radiation and other technique either in diagnostic imaging or radiotherapy¹.

It is expected that the radiographer will have professional autonomy and accountability, develop good professional relationships, develop personal and professional skills and demonstrate an ethical and knowledgeable understanding of the profession⁷. The Radiographer (therapist) is that professional that delivers the prescribed dose of radiation for the purpose of treatment of diseases¹. It is also expected that the application of radiographic and radio-therapeutic practice in securing, maintaining or improving health and well-being; the development of knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin their education and training will contribute to future health and well-being of the patient⁷. The radiographer as a healthcare team member interacts with other professionals in the primary and secondary healthcare environment to provide an optimum diagnostic or therapeutic outcome⁷.

The radiographer is responsible for radiation protection, patient care and quality assurance of the radiological or radio-therapeutic process⁷. All radiographers have a responsibility towards users of their services and a unique individual responsibility for the optimization of any ionizing or non-ionizing radiation dose to individuals and to the genetic inheritance of the public at large⁶.

Radiographers are ethically and legally obliged to protect the confidentiality and security of patient information acquired through their professional duties, except where there is a legal requirement to do otherwise. They must also act in such a manner as to justify public trust and confidence, upholding and serving both the public interests and the interests of patients as well as the College of Radiographers⁸.

Patients that arrive the X-ray department are often worried or apprehensive and this may make it difficult for them to understand instruction and may even result in apparently aggressive attitude. In such cases, the radiographer must be understanding, tolerant and should make every effort to obtain the co-operation of the patient.

Without co-operation it will be seldom possible to obtain good results in radiographic examination. By a calm and friendly manner and tone of the voice of the radiographer, a great deal of confidence is given to the patient that he/she is in the care of efficient and sympathetic health care personnel. He thus, will see his examination as both necessary and being performed in a department where his well-being is of real interest and concern to the staff⁹.

The discipline of radiography as a whole is often regarded as a supporting function in the healthcare chain, and a stepping-stone in the diagnostic process. This status of the discipline seems to have left many radiographers in a position of substantial confusion¹⁰.

It is therefore useful to examine the professional status of Radiography and the kind of the expertise expected of a Radiographer in North Eastern Nigeria. Therefore the study is aimed to determine the status of professional ethics among radiographers in North Eastern Nigeria.

METHODS

The study was a prospective cross-sectional survey study, that targeted radiographers practicing in different hospitals within the North East region of Nigeria which include Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Taraba states.

A convenience sample of 58 respondents participated in the study. The data collection instrument was a twenty-three-item self-completion questionnaire issued to the radiographers by post, 51 were filled out and returned during the period of data collection (three months), giving a response rate of 88%. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentages and frequencies and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 16.0.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents consisted of 72.5% (n=37) males and 27.5% (n=14) females. Most of the respondents 70.6 (n=36) were between 30 and 40 years of age. More than half of the respondents 58.8% (n=30) had a Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.) degree in Medical Radiography, 13.7(n=7) had diploma College of Radiographers (DCR) London and only 9.8(n=3) had Diploma Institute of Radiography (DIR) Nigeria.

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None had MSc or PhD. The respondents with work experience of 1-5 years had the highest frequency of occurrence, 66.7% (n=34), while those with work experience of 31 years and above appeared to be the least, 5.9% (n=3). Those respondents with work experience of 6-10 years, 11-15 years and 16-30 years represents 9.8% (n=5), 2.0% (n=1) and 15.7% (n=8) respectively. Almost all the respondents, 92.2% (n=47), were fully registered with RRBN, while, 7.8% (n=4) were yet to be registered at the time of study.

Greater percentage of the respondents were from Borno State 31.4% (n=16), while the rest were from Gombe State, 25.5% (n=13), Bauchi State, 21.6% (n=11), Adamawa State 9.8% (n=5), Taraba State, 9.8% (n=5) and Yobe State 2.0% (n=1) (Figure 1).

More than two third of the respondents, 86.3% (n=44) defined radiographic ethical codes as rules that govern the practice of radiography, while 11.8% (n=6) of the respondents defined it, only as scope of practice of radiography, while 1.9% (n=3) do not know (Figure 2)

Most of the respondents, 37.3% (n=19) never had further graduate training in radiography, while 11.8% (n=6), had further graduate training regularly. Those respondents that had further graduate training periodically and only once were 17.6% (n=9) and 31.4% (n=16) respectively (Figure 3).

More than two third of the respondents, 82.4% (n=42) had no incidence of litigation against a radiographer in their centers, while 15.7% (n=8) revealed that they don't know whether there is or no such incidence (Figure 4).

About 74.5% (n=38) of the respondents sought patients consent before carrying out their examinations always, while 25.5% (n=13) of the respondents sought patients consent only when necessary (Figure 5).

Majority of the respondents, 82.4% (n=42) were aware of RRBN ethical code of practice, while only 17.6% (n=9) of the respondents had no knowledge of the ethical code of practice. Among the respondents that have knowledge of RRBN ethical code of practice, 66.7% (n=34) apply it regularly in their practice, 13.7% (n=7) apply it occasionally and only 9.8% (n=5) of the respondents that do not apply it at all in their practice (Figure 6).

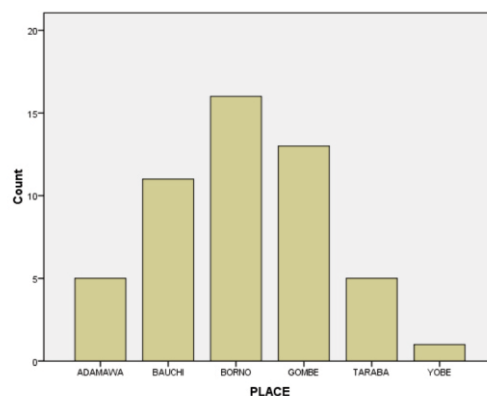


Figure 1: Respondents' Place of Practice

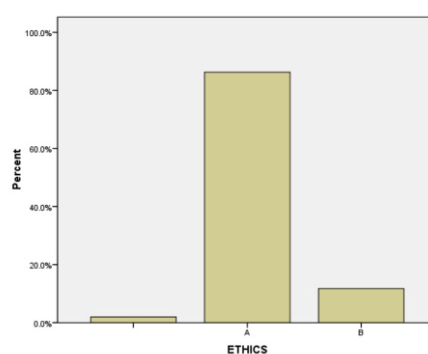


Figure 2: Meaning of Radiography Ethical Code

A = Rules that govern the practice of radiography
B = The scope of practice of radiography
C = Do not know

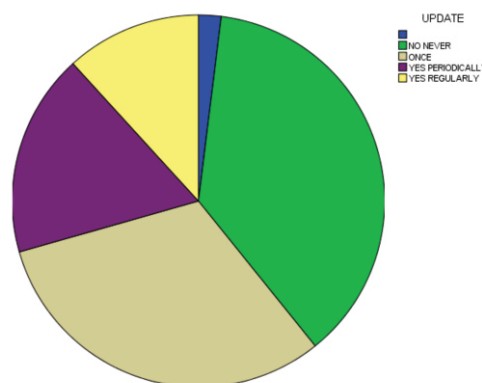


Figure 3: Further Graduate Training in Radiography

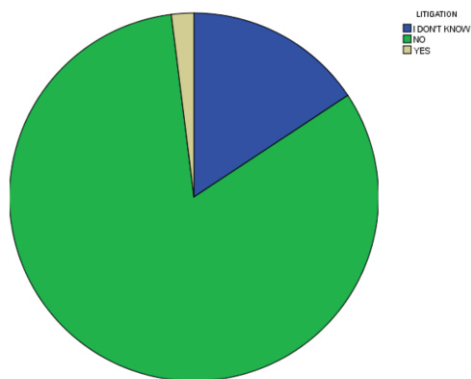


Figure 4: Incidence of Litigation against Radiographers

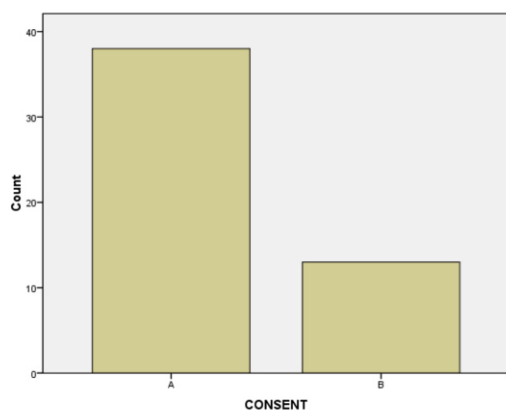


Figure 5: Informed Consent

Key

A= yes (Always)

B=only when necessary

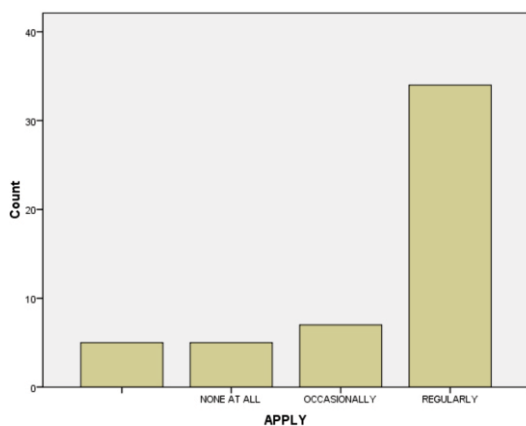


Figure 6: Application of RRBN Ethical Code of Practice

DISCUSSION

The status of health care worldwide has increased in recent times and this has also translated into positive developments in facilities and services rendered especially in the field of radiography. These developments notwithstanding also come with its own measure of responsibilities that is required of professional players in the medical field. These measures of responsibilities are as a result of expectations that come with the introduction of professionalism in any industry. Professionalism with respect to radiography is defined as “a system, organized to govern itself and to effectively set standards of professional behavior, education and qualification to practice and to enforce those standards within its ranks”¹¹.

More than two third of the respondents, 86.3% (n=44) definition of ethical code were in agreement with De-Heer's definition as rules that govern the practice of a profession. Although 11.8% (n= 6) of the respondents were ignorant of definition of radiography ethical codes. About 37.3% (n=19) of the respondents never had further graduate training. This may be as a result of lack of sponsorship to continuous professional education in radiography from their employers. Litigation is a major challenge in the medical profession today. However almost all the respondents, 82.4% (n=42) had no history of litigation against a radiographer at their centers. This probably signifies that most of the respondents were practicing in accordance with professional ethics or it could be due to patients negligence of their right or some may not even be aware of their rights, in some cases culture and religious inclination could as well be a contributory factor.

Majority of the respondents, 74.5% sought patients consent before carrying out their examination, which is in accordance with the current ethical code of practice. Legal doctrines have been developed over the ages to protect the weak in the society. The doctrine of informed consent is a legal doctrine that has evolved sociologically with the changing times and the court has mandated that every patient is entitled to an informed consent before any procedure can be performed. Informed consent is the principle which when adhered to strictly will help to avoid legal tussles¹¹. Forcing a patient to a procedure is unethical.

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It is an essential part of the radiographers' ethical responsibility to be knowledgeable about radiation safety and use this knowledge to avoid all unnecessary radiation exposure to patients, self and co-workers as stated by De-Heer¹¹.

More than two third of the respondents, 82.4% knew RRBN ethical code of practice, out of which 66.7% apply it regularly, 13.7% apply it occasionally and only 9.8% of the respondents that do not apply it at all in their practice, this indicated that greater percentage of the respondents were practicing in accordance with professional ethics.

CONCLUSION

There is high level of compliance to professional ethics among radiographers in North Eastern Nigeria. However, there is still room for improvement on certain areas like participation in Continuous Professional Development Programs, Role Advancement Programs in radiography, which should be organized regularly and radiographers should be encouraged to attend by sponsorship and also by bringing the programs close to them.

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