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Medical errors: knowledge and perception among doctors practicing in a state in South-East Nigeria

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Objective: To evaluate the knowledge and perception of medical errors among doctors practising in Anambra state.

Methodology: This is a cross-sectional study. The study instrument was self-administered questionnaire distributed between August 2021 and January 2022. Data was analysed using SPSS version 25 Demographic variables like age, gender, cadre of practice and years of post-graduation were obtained, Outcome variables were knowledge of medical errors, committal of medical errors in the past, common areas of medical errors, frequency of disclosure among respondents, and attitude towards disclosure and psychological disposition after error

Results: A total of 239 doctors partook, 84.1% were males. The mean age in practice was 38.0+/-10.7 years. Resident doctors accounted for 42.4% of the respondents. The respondents were 11.1 +/- 9.9 years' post-graduation. About 97.5% were aware of medical errors, while 89.1% agree that many doctors do commit medical errors. Medical prescription and Laboratory result ordering error where the most known medical errors. Only 71% believed that life threatening errors should be disclosed to the relatives. Among the respondents, only 66% admitted to have ever committed medical errors with wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription being the most common areas of error. Disclosure was very frequent in 8.2%, while 6.8% disclosed somewhat frequently, 42.2% occasionally, 19% somewhat infrequently, 23.8% very infrequently. Attitude towards disclosure was positive in 64.5%. Self-reported psychological disposition after medical errors was: Depression (65%), Anxiety (60%), Indifference (10.5%). One respondent had faced the law and was indicted.

Conclusion: Medical errors awareness is relatively high. Wrong diagnosis and prescription errors rank highest among the participants. There is need for institutional, team and individual approach to reduce these errors.

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