

### Views of nigerian ophthalmologists on the state of ophthalmic research in their country

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**Background:** The deplorable eye health indices prevailing in sub-Saharan Africa make it imperative and provide unique opportunities for ophthalmologists to conduct quality and relevant ophthalmic research.

**Aim:** To collate and study the views ophthalmologists on the general situation of ophthalmic research in Nigeria and draw appropriate policy implications.

**Methods:** Structured questionnaires were distributed to consenting 120 ophthalmologists and ophthalmic residents that were attending an annual congress in Nigeria in September 2009. Participants' background information, importance attached to research, motivations for conducting research, funding, ethical oversight, literature search, and statistical support were probed. Also explored were their relative research priorities, frequency of publications, research types, publication media, challenges faced in publishing and impact on health practice or policy

were collected. The coded responses were stored and analyzed using the statistical SPSS software.

**Results:** Eighty-nine out of the 120 questionnaires distributed were returned giving a response rate of 74.2%. Research function was rated a distant last by 49.5% of the respondents after clinical service (93.2%), teaching (63.1%) and community service (62.8%). Advancement of knowledge was the strongest motivating factor for conducting research (78.2 %). Securing funding (91.8%) and finding time (78.8%) were their major constraints. Their institutions ethical review organs were indicated as being sub-optimal. Most of their literature search was conducted on the internet (79.3%) and this is independent of their ages ( $p=0.465$ ). They stored and analyzed their research data with commonly available statistical software.

Childhood blindness was given the highest priority for ophthalmic research by 42.9% of the respondents, and genetic studies had the least priority (19.8%). About two-thirds of the respondents had either never been involved or only involved occasionally in any type of ophthalmic research. Clinical trials (13.1%) and basic science studies (12%) were the least-performed types of research. About 51% of the respondents indicated that they had never published in journals nor did so "occasionally"; only 9% quarterly and 43% published less than once a year. They also indicated that their research very rarely resulted in change of clinical practice or health policy (20%).

**Conclusions:** Our study respondents regarded research highly but were severely constrained in conducting research by lack of access to sources of funding and finding time from clinical workload. Research works conducted by respondents were largely simple low-budget ones that rarely had significant impacts and outcomes, including publication. We recommend periodic (re) training in conducting good research and how to successfully apply for research grants; and giving some protected research time for ophthalmologists in Nigeria.

### Biography

Abdulraheem Mahmoud is a Professor of Ophthalmology and Consultant Ophthalmologist at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin, Nigeria. He graduated as a physician at the age of 21 years at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. He had his residency training at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Kaduna, with one year clinical attachment at the Leicester Royal Infirmary, Leicester, UK. His subspecialty training in retinal diseases was obtained at the El Maghraby Eye Hospital, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He has published more than 50 papers with 20 of them PubMed-indexed. He is a reviewer for 11 local and international journals.