

EDITORIAL

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HEALTH SERVICES IN OUR TERTIARY HOSPITALS

The need to improve the quality, safety and affordability of healthcare for all Nigerians is imperative at this time. At a time when the Nation's health care delivery system ought to have made substantial progress, the environment of practice in the three cadres of health care – primary, secondary and tertiary are almost at its lowest ebb; services are not prompt and there are no adequate returns on investment to all stakeholders. All these probably have led to the high level of medical tourism in our country, with its attendant wastage of our scarce foreign resources. The tertiary healthcare services across the country share similarity in many respects – poor funding, deteriorating physical infrastructures, misdiagnosis due to lack of suitable equipments, poor motivation of workers, low productivity, inavailability of basic amenities such as water, electricity and unending strike actions. Mortality and morbidity rates in many of the vulnerable departments such as Obstetrics and Gynaecology Pediatrics and Surgery are on the increase. The laboratories are almost non-existent as basic investigations cannot be done in most cases except in private set ups. Even emergency surgeries in Obstetrics often fail to be conducted at the appropriate time for lack of effective and efficient laboratory support and other minor challenges. As a matter of fact, the tertiary hospitals which should serve as a saving grace for referrals from the primary and secondary health care facilities can no longer meet with the vision and objectives for which they are set up.

It is therefore important that policy makers take a second look at strategic planning now that a new government is about to come into place, to reverse the observed shortcomings in the quality of health care in

Nigeria. Patients, healthcare providers and policy makers definitely have roles to play in ensuring quality health care delivery. There is no doubt that patients face all barriers in accessing, using and complying with medical care because of poverty and inadequate knowledge concerning their medical plights. Unknowingly these often lead to late presentation in the hospitals and therefore increased mortality and morbidity. Solving this important challenge requires policy makers to develop policies that will empower the vulnerable such as pregnant women, under 5 children, the elderly and the physically challenged. The initiative of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in this direction needs to be applauded and further intensified. Strategies for intervening with patients to improve quality is also important. Patients must be encouraged to know the various dimensions of quality and demand for quality services at all time.

The policy makers and leadership of our hospitals will do well by looking at the systematic framework for diagnosing health system problems and designing reform strategies to ensure quality improvement. System failure is a major challenge in many of our hospitals which leaderships do not pay attention to. The leadership of our hospitals need to build and sustain the hospital culture for quality. The introduction of performance based compensation is a veritable means of motivating the health care providers, the introduction of which will promote efficient, effective and high quality service.

The various articles highlighted in this edition elaborate on issues of quality improvement in our health care services dwelling on medical malpractice, audit of prevention of maternal to

child transmission of HIV, anaemia in pregnancy, challenges in the management of malaria, urinary tract infection, etc in pregnancy and the quality improvement required in the management of adolescent female prostitution and gestational trophoblastic disease.

Improving patient safety through appropriate tools

for problem identification and analysis and motivating workers to use evidence based practice which identifies errors as early as possible, coupled with a vigilant robust health care leadership that believes in quality health care are sine qua non for improved quality of healthcare particularly in our tertiary hospitals in Nigeria.

Olusola B. Fasubaa
Editor-in-Chief