

SURGICAL EXPERTS CALL FOR IMPROVED EFFICIENCIES THROUGH INCREASED CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN NIGERIA.

Surgical experts of the National Institute of Health Research, Global Surgery Unit, Nigeria Network have called for improvement in surgical outcomes for patients through increased cross-functional collaboration and partnership in Nigeria. This call was made during the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), Global Surgery Unit Nigeria Hub Network's Dissemination and Engagement conference that was held at the Southern Sun Hotel, Ikoyi, Lagos State on June 16, 2022.

The Director of the Nigeria Hub Network, Prof. Adesoji Ademuyiwa, explained that the main aim of the conference was to disseminate the outcome of the Global Surg Unit 1 Studies and trials to Nigerian Regulatory Bodies, Government Agencies as well as Policy Makers and to also engage them in fruitful partnerships. He also added that the secondary objectives of the conference were to introduce the participating centers to rural surgeries, update them on new projects within the NIHR GSU Network and introduce them to Community Engagement and Involvement.

The Director of the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery, University of Birmingham, Prof. Dion Morton, spoke about the current worth of the Nigeria Network and its worth in the foreseeable future. He also spoke extensively about study development and grant writing by stating three decisive factors that would help; these factors are the Team, the Topic or Design and the Trial Delivery.

Prof. Ewen Harrison, a Professor of Surgery and Data Science at the University of Edinburgh while enlightening the surgical experts about grant ideas that would never be funded, emphasized the need to avoid certain pitfalls when writing and designing studies for grant funding. He explained that most times, grant ideas fail due to its failure to get across the importance of the work, failure to align the application with the funder's strategy, e.t.c.

Speaking on how to build a multi-disciplinary research team for international grants, Mr. Aneel Bhangu, an NIHR Clinician Scientist in Global explained that world class teams can be built by dispersing credit, building leadership positions, supporting others' projects and priorities, ensuring regular communication and embedding trainees at every stage.

Dr. Audrey Nganwa, the Project Manager for the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery spoke about how to access funding for proposed grants. This she explained would have to begin with identifying potential funders, preparing a budget, writing a grant application and reviewing the application.

According to the National Health Research Ethics Committee Chairman's representatives – Dr. (Mrs.) Mafe Margaret and Mr. Ado Danladi, the Nigeria Network's engagement with the regulatory body elicited a sense of partnership with an assurance that subsequent proposals by the institute would be treated with the seriousness and urgency it needs. They also assured the researchers that the turnaround time for review, assessment and approval would be closer to 21 days than 90 days.

The representative from the Federal Ministry of Health, Dr. Kamil Shoretire, commended the ground-breaking research output from the Nigeria Network and was very impressed with the collaborative effort in solving locally relevant surgical challenges. He challenged the Unit to notify the Federal Ministry of Health, through the Department of Hospital Services whenever research is being carried out across federal institutions for the purpose of their monitoring and evaluation. He also encouraged the network that in designing studies that may require policy change at the National level, funds should be allocated to a stakeholder's forum where evidence from the studies can be discussed and logistics of policy adoption can be considered for its smooth implementation.

The Deputy Provost from the College of Medicine, University of Lagos, Prof. O.A.T. Ebuehi in his goodwill speech, stated that the primary aim of the global surgery unit is to empower frontline surgeons to bring out a positive change for their patients while advocating to policy makers for high level change. He also stated that, the research outcomes disseminated during the conference would be of immense benefits to his colleagues, clinicians and allied health workers and key stakeholders in surgical research in Nigeria and across the world.

Dr. (Mrs.) Omolara Williams, a Paediatric Surgeon at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) expressed her joy by stating that the collaboration has yielded significant results and it is something that should be learnt from. She also mentioned that with the collaboration, surgeons can build strength and capacity.

The members of the network were also strongly encouraged to develop their research ideas into proposals that would involve nationwide spread for the purpose of data generation and practice-changing evidence. It was also emphasized that such proposals are to be made ready to meet grant applications whenever suitable calls are available and the Hub Office would be available to provide necessary assistance to spokes in developing such proposals and obtaining regulatory approvals.

Dr. Adewale Adisa, a General Surgeon from the Department of Surgery, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and Deputy Director for the Nigeria Hub, stated that it is highly important for Surgeons to collaborate and work together as it would be a great privilege to have surgeons from various backgrounds, specialization and hospitals coming together for the benefits of the patients. According to him, “if you want to go far and achieve a lot, work together”.

The Conference further strengthened the belief of the Surgical researchers that collective collaboration will aid the provision of Surgical Evidences, support practice change and promote clinical collaboration at all levels.