Questionable Research Practices

An African Perspective

Francis Kombe and Limbanazo Matandika

Romans 3: 23
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

INTRODUCTION

- Research integrity=Individual Researcher's Integrity

- Research ethics=research protocol/proposal

KEY ETHICAL VALUES/PRINCIPLES

Accountability

Transparency

Responsibility

Honesty in all aspects of research

Accountability in the conduct of research

Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others

Good stewardship of research on behalf of others

DOING THE RIGHT THING

SCIENTIFIC STANDARD

- Applying ethical values in everyday life

- Upholding PROFESSIONALISM

- Building and maintaining TRUST

RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Serious deviation from scientific standard

- Fabrication

- Falsification

- Plagiarism

What are Questionable Research Practices?

WHAT ARE QUESTIONABLE RESEARCH PRACTICES?

- Violation of scientific standards other than FFP
  - Conflict of obligation (researcher/physician)
    - Pressure to recruit
    - Same PI in multiple studies

QUESTIONABLE RESEARCH PRACTICES

- Conflict of interest
  - Obligations to sponsors vs scientific integrity
    - Raises risk of error, bias, misconduct, exploitation, etc.
- Financial mismanagement
- Protocol deviation
- Starting study without final approval
- Salami (multiple) and duplicate (repeat) publications

RESEARCH INTEGRITY IN CONTEXT

- **Research is alien**
  - Mistrust
  - Fears of the unknown
  - Potential for exploitation

  BUILDING TRUST

- **Ground realities**
  - Theory verses application
  - The role of frontline staff

  ETHICAL DILEMMAS

- **Overreliance on external support**
  - Power imbalances
  - Lack/weak of regulatory systems

  BIG BROTHER SCIENCE

RESEARCH INTEGRITY IN CONTEXT

- Institutional governance and regulatory systems are still evolving and weak

- There is lack of training and capacity for regulatory institutions to work independently and efficiently

WHAT CHALLENGES EXIST?

WHAT CHALLENGES EXIST?

- Overreliance in external funding
- No input/investment from Africa
- Lack of political good will by national governments
  - Research not part of national agenda
  - Corruption/power/Politicking/ insecurity

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO AVOID QRP?

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO AVOID QRP?

- Training and promoting ethics
- Creating awareness of best practices and complexities in research
- Build skills on solving complex ethical problems
  - What are ethical challenges and dilemmas?
  - Guidelines ?
  - Deliberative space/Experience sharing
  - Advice from peers/best practice
- Clear institutional policies in dealing with RM/QRP

1. **Developing enabling environment**
   – Invest in development of governance and regulatory policies and structures at local and national levels to review, monitor and deal with undesirable research practices fairly and transparently

   – Invest in technological and financial resources to empower local scientists, students and communities in RCR

   – Designated office/person to report on RM and QRP

2. **Capacity building**
   – Strong mentorship programmes
   – Training in ethics and RCR using pedagogies that develops moral intuition
   – Support supervision
   – North to South technology transfer to strengthen local capacity in addressing research integrity issues- Development of competent regulatory mechanisms
   – Competent IRBs/RECs

3. Establish and engage in equitable transnational partnerships

- Respect local regulatory and governance systems
- Foster transparency, accountability and responsible conduct of research

4. Build local/regional networks that foster RCR in Africa

- Develop harmonized approaches that bind researchers working anywhere on the continent

CONCLUSION

- Negligence=QRP- **Genuine errors occur**

- Research misconduct=**Misuse of funds/Abuse public trust**

- Setting standards/policies-**Take responsibilities**

- Partnership-Genuine-**Fair and transparent collaborations**

- Professionalism-**Promote collegiality and trustworthiness**

- Objectivity-Don't assume….**Dialogue/Communication/ask!**

Thank you

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- Prof Doug Wassenaar

- Limbanazo Matandika

- National Academy of Sciences

- Christa van Zyl