Sociological Anatomy of Healthcare: Nurses' Intentions to Disclose Clinical Errors within the Context of Peer Surveillance in Ghana

Awinaba Amoah Adongo
University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Ghana

Background: Clinical error disclosure remains a critical issue in healthcare systems worldwide. Although, transparent reporting of clinical errors is essential for patient safety and organisational learning, healthcare professionals often hesitate to disclose mistakes due to professional stigma, institutional hierarchies, and perceived peer surveillance. This study explored the sociological dynamics shaping nurses' intentions to disclose clinical errors within the context of peer surveillance in a Ghanaian healthcare setting.

Methods: The study adopted an exploratory qualitative case study design guided by the interpretive description approach. Fifteen nurses were purposively recruited and data were collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide designed to explore perceptions of clinical error disclosure and peer monitoring practices. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings identified four major themes: (1) normalisation of clinical errors within institutional culture; (2) Peer surveillance and professional accountability; (3) Fear of professional consequences and reputational damage and (4) Ethical commitment to patient safety. The findings indicate that nurses' intentions to disclose clinical errors are shaped by a complex interplay between professional ethics, organisational culture, peer observation, and perceived behavioural social control.

Conclusion: The study indicates that peer surveillance plays both a regulatory and deterrent role in clinical error disclosure. Although, some nurses perceived peer monitoring as promoting accountability, others interpret it as a mechanism of professional policing that discourages open disclosure. Strengthening supportive organisational cultures and non-punitive reporting systems may improve clinical error disclosure.

Biography

Awinaba Amoah Adongo is a Sociologist with a specialisation in Health Sociology, focusing on population health, social epidemiology, maternal and child health, human reproductive health, health gerontology, behavioural health models, and health promotion. His research interests also include health demography, gender and health, nursing sociology, etc. He has published several papers in international peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus.