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Ethical challenges with conducting vaccine trials in Africa

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Introduction: Several clinical vaccine trials are currently being conducted in diverse settings in sub-Saharan Africa; many as part of global North-South collaborations. The diversity of the region and difference between the cultural and regulatory settings in the global North and South creates often complex ethical situations. Timely and attentive attention to these differences is a key to ensure an ethical review process and trial conduct that meets international and local needs.

Methods: Some of the ethical challenges encountered in these situations include age for consent/assent, provision of trial information to trial participants in an understandable format, minimizing coercion in low resource settings with poor health care and the non-existence or poor functioning of regulatory authorities in many of these settings.

Results: Strategies being employed or proposed to circumvent some of these challenges includes the need to understand the study setting and interaction with whatever formal or informal regulatory systems obtain; the need to innovate to provide standards that are acceptable locally and internationally, while thinking outside the box and the need for constant dialogue between partners.

Conclusion: The complex landscape of vaccine trials in sub-Saharan Africa requires innovative thinking and constant dialogue to circumvent the ethical rising dilemmas.

Biography

Olubukola T. Idoko is Paediatrician and Clinical Trial Coordinator at the Medical Research Council Unit in The Gambia. She trained in Medicine and subsequently paediatrics at the Jos University Teaching Hospital in Nigeria and in Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She also has training in vaccinology. Her current research interests centre on vaccines for paediatric infectious disease and infectious disease epidemiology. She has been involved in and led the conduct of several clinical trials and is author of several articles and book chapters

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