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Dissecting “Anatomy” – Act Cap 17, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria: The Need for its Amendment

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ABSTRACT

“Anatomy” – Act Cap 17, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria is an act made in 1933 to regulate Schools of Anatomy in Nigeria. It is arranged in twelve (12) sections, makes room for the practice of anatomy in Nigeria and makes lawful for anatomy practitioners to be licensed by the Minister of Health to practice but limits anatomy practice solely to possession of cadavers and carrying out of anatomical examination on such cadavers for the purpose of learning and research. This study assessed the need for advancement of strategies for amendment of Anatomy act in the Laws of the Federation. We dissected Anatomy act looking into its provision for establishment of machinery for constant execution of the act, training, discipline, registration and licensure of anatomy practitioners in Nigeria. We compared these with what are obtainable in seven (7) other similar and health related laws of the Federation of Nigeria. Despite the fact that Anatomy act was the first health related act made into Laws of the Federation, it is the least developed and most neglected law among its peers. While all related laws made provision for establishment of regulatory bodies with full power and adequate funding from the government, Anatomy act does not even have any link to the Ministry of Health. Even with the provision that anatomists in Nigeria will be licensed to practise their profession, not the eldest anatomist could provide an old copy of a license to practice, let alone talking of the fields of practice. We wish to recommend that strategies should be worked out on amendment of the current Anatomy act.

KEYWORDS: Anatomy act, practicing license, regulatory body, schools of anatomy

INTRODUCTION

“Anatomy” – Act Cap 17, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria is an act made in 1933 to regulate Schools of Anatomy in Nigeria. It is arranged in twelve (12) sections as thus: short title of the act; provision for granting licenses to practice anatomy by the Minister of Health; provision for lawful possession of cadavers and permission to carry out anatomical examination on such cadavers by Schools of Anatomy; provision for an individual to direct anatomical examination on himself after death; provision for movement of cadavers strictly with certificates; permission of superintendents of Schools of Anatomy to receive cadavers for anatomical examination; provision for keeping certificates and records of cadavers received by the superintendents of Schools of Anatomy; modalities for removal of cadavers for anatomical examination; protection of Schools of Anatomy and anatomy practitioners from prosecution for possessing human bodies; limit to the Act from postmortem examination; penalties for contravention of the act; and power to the

: Minister of Health to make regulations and prescribe forms of licenses and certificates.

: This Act makes room for the practice of anatomy in Nigeria and makes lawful for anatomy practitioners to be licensed by the Minister of Health to practice, but limits anatomy practice solely to possession of cadavers and carrying out of anatomical examination on such cadavers for the purpose of learning and research. Different sections of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria are being reviewed and amended at one time or the other for changing circumstances while Anatomy Act has since 1933 never had the opportunity of being amended. Despite the provision for a limited practice of anatomy in the Laws of the Federation, anatomy is neither known nor seen to be practiced by many in the country. This study aimed at assessing the need for advancement of strategies for amendment of Anatomy Act in the face of the very tremendous and grossly conspicuous changes in anatomy in the country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We dissected Anatomy Act looking into its provision for establishment of machinery for constant execution of the act, financial provision from government, training, discipline, registration and maintenance of registers and licensure of anatomy practitioners in Nigeria. We compared these with what are obtainable in seven (7) other similar and health related laws of the Federation of Nigeria.

RESULTS

Our study revealed that Anatomy Act is the oldest health related law enacted in Nigeria with no provision for establishment of machinery for its execution, government financial backing, register and training of practitioners (Table I).

Table I: Comparison of Health Related Acts of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria

ACT	YEAR OF ENACTMENT	ESTABLISHED MACHINERY	GOVT FINANCIAL PROVISION	REGISTER	PROVISION FOR TRAINING	PROVISION FOR DISCIPLINE	LICENSURE TO PRACTICE
ANAT	03/1933	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	YES	YES
N&M	09/1966	NCN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
VS	09/1969	VCN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
M&DP	06/1988	MDCN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
MRT	09/1988	MRTRBN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
HRO	12/1989	HRORBN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
DT	08/1993	DTRBN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
MLSCN	06/2003	MLSCN	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

ANAT: Anatomy Act

N&M: Nursing and Midwifery Act

NCN: Nursing Council of Nigeria

VS: Veterinary Surgeons Act

VCN: Veterinary Council of Nigeria

M&DP: Medical and Dental Practitioners Act

MDCN: Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria

MRT: Medical Rehabilitation Therapists Act

MRTRBN: Medical Rehabilitation Therapists Registration Board of Nigeria

HRO: Health Record Officers Act

HRORBN: Health Record Officers Registration Board of Nigeria

DT: Dental technologists Act

DTRBN: Dental technologists Registration Board of Nigeria

MLSCN: Medical Laboratory Science Council Act

MLSCN: Medical Laboratory Science Council

DISCUSSION

Despite the fact that Anatomy act was the first health related act made into Laws of the Federation, it is the least developed and most neglected law among its peers. While all related laws made provision for establishment of regulatory bodies with full power and adequate funding from the government, Anatomy act does not even have any link to the Ministry of Health. Even with the provision that anatomists in Nigeria will be licensed to practise their profession, not the eldest anatomist or school could provide an old copy of a license to practice, let alone talking of the fields of practice. Having identified the fact that anatomy act is the least developed and most neglected medical related professional act in the Laws of the Federation, we concluded that there is the timely need for Anatomical Society of Nigeria (ASN) and other related professional bodies to advance strategies for amendment of the current anatomy act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We wish to recommend that strategies should be worked out on amendment of the current Anatomy act to include sections on the establishment of a regulatory body (Nigerian Anatomy Council) as an agency of Federal Ministry of Health, duties/responsibilities of such established council and powers of the council to make codes of professional conduct, execute the various responsibilities and establish panels and tribunals for enforcement of the codes of professional conduct. We also wish to recommend that duties/responsibilities of the council should include regulation of the training and teaching of Human Anatomy and Anatomical Sciences in Nigeria, regulation of anatomy practice in Nigeria, regulation and control of anatomy laboratories (gross anatomy,

clinical embryology/IVF, histology/histochemistry, cytogenetics, tissue culture, sperm and oocyte banks, biological anthropology etc), mortuaries and anatomy museums in Nigeria, determination of the knowledge and skills of anatomists, securing and maintenance of registers of persons entitled to practice as anatomists and anatomy technicians in Nigeria, and publication of lists of those persons from time to time, preparation and review of rules/codes of professional conduct which the council may consider desirable for the practice of anatomy in Nigeria, granting a license to practise anatomy to individual registered anatomists and anatomy technicians.

Anatomy practice in Nigeria should be made to include training of anatomists in Nigerian universities at all levels, teaching of anatomy to anatomical, medical and allied health students in post secondary institutions of learning (universities, medical schools, nursing schools, schools of health technology etc), carrying out anatomical examinations in anatomy laboratories, carrying out mortuary and anatomy museum services in hospitals, research institutes and tertiary institutions of learning, carrying out embryological/IVF related and cytogenetic procedures in hospitals, research institutes and tertiary institutions of learning, working as scientists and anatomy technicians in the various laboratories of anatomy in the country.

REFERENCE

1. Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2006). Cited 21st September, 2015. Available on <http://www.nigeria-law.org.LFNMainPage.htm>