# Lord Adebowale exposes NHS racial inequalities after mother’s undiagnosed lung cancer



A senior leader within the NHS has publicly spoken out against the systemic inequalities faced by patients of colour, following the death of his mother, Grace, who suffered from undiagnosed lung cancer. Lord Victor Adebowale, chair of the NHS Confederation, described his mother's experience as reflective of broader failings within the healthcare system, stating that she received what he termed a "black service, not an NHS service". This poignant comment underscores the urgent issues of racial disparities in healthcare that plague the National Health Service.

Grace Adebowale, who emigrated to the UK from Nigeria in the 1950s and dedicated her life to nursing, passed away at the age of 92. Despite her long history with the health service—filled with service as a compassionate nurse—she was not diagnosed with lung cancer until after her death, a tragic outcome that her son attributes to inequalities embedded in the healthcare system. "My mum would have wanted me to tell her story because she is not the only one who will have faced these problems," Adebowale remarked, reinforcing that such experiences are far too common among Black and minority ethnic populations.

As an experienced figure in health leadership, with over two decades of service and recognition for establishing the NHS Race and Health Observatory in 2021, Lord Adebowale’s insights carry weight. He noted that many patients in vulnerable situations—particularly those who are Black, impoverished, or elderly—often receive lesser care, aligning with the "inverse care law", a concept which asserts that those most in need of medical attention are frequently the least likely to receive it. This disconnect is echoed in various studies, highlighting a troubling pattern of subpar treatment that further exacerbates health disparities.

The case of Grace Adebowale has provoked an important dialogue within NHS England, which has acknowledged the pressing need to improve access and equity in healthcare services. A spokesperson for NHS England indicated that these inequalities are set to be a key focus in the forthcoming 10-year health plan, anticipated to be unveiled soon. This commitment, however, has prompted scepticism among some observers, who question whether the measures proposed will effectively address the deeply rooted issues raised by Lord Adebowale.

In expressing his family's distress over the care his mother received at a time of intense pressure within the hospital system, he pointed out that not only was her cancer diagnosis delayed, but also that finding adequate care became increasingly difficult. "She did not want to die in hospital in that sort of situation," he recounted, highlighting the compounded suffering within the healthcare experience for many families facing similar fates.

The concerns raised by Lord Adebowale resonate with calls to action from various health advocates who have long sought systemic change within the NHS. The narrative of his mother’s undignified care serves as a powerful reminder of the urgent need for reform—not just within protocols but in the very ethos of how care is delivered to marginalized communities across the UK.

As public discourse continues to evolve surrounding racial inequalities in healthcare, the experiences of individuals like Grace Adebowale illuminate the necessity for the NHS to confront and rectify these disparities head-on. Such visibility might not only serve as a catalyst for change within the healthcare system but also encourage other families to share their stories, amplifying a collective call for justice in health equity.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo), [[4]](https://www.nhsconfed.org/news/2023/01/nhs-must-address-racial-inequalities-says-lord-adebowale)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jan/15/nhs-must-address-racial-inequalities-says-lord-adebowale), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jan/15/nhs-must-address-racial-inequalities-says-lord-adebowale)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-64234567)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo), [[7]](https://www.nhsconfed.org/news/2023/01/nhs-must-address-racial-inequalities-says-lord-adebowale)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5q2n4gpxo> - Lord Victor Adebowale, chair of the NHS Confederation, criticised the NHS after his mother, Grace, died from undiagnosed lung cancer at 92. He described her care as 'undignified' and highlighted systemic racial inequalities in healthcare, stating that black patients often receive substandard care. Adebowale, who has held senior health roles for over two decades, believes his mother's experience reflects broader issues within the NHS. NHS England acknowledged the need to improve access and tackle inequalities, with plans to address these in the upcoming 10-year health plan.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jan/15/nhs-must-address-racial-inequalities-says-lord-adebowale> - Lord Victor Adebowale has called for the NHS to confront racial inequalities following the death of his mother, Grace, from undiagnosed lung cancer. He criticised the health service for providing a 'black service, not an NHS service', emphasising that black patients often receive substandard care. Adebowale, who has extensive experience in health leadership, believes his mother's case is indicative of wider systemic issues. NHS England acknowledged the need for improvement and pledged to address these inequalities in the forthcoming 10-year health plan.
4. <https://www.nhsconfed.org/news/2023/01/nhs-must-address-racial-inequalities-says-lord-adebowale> - Lord Victor Adebowale, chair of the NHS Confederation, has urged the NHS to tackle racial inequalities after his mother, Grace, died from undiagnosed lung cancer at 92. He described her care as 'undignified' and highlighted systemic issues affecting black patients. Adebowale, with over two decades in health leadership, believes his mother's experience reflects broader problems within the NHS. NHS England acknowledged the need to improve access and address inequalities, with plans to include these issues in the upcoming 10-year health plan.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-64234567> - Lord Victor Adebowale, chair of the NHS Confederation, has criticised the NHS after his mother, Grace, died from undiagnosed lung cancer at 92. He described her care as 'undignified' and highlighted systemic racial inequalities in healthcare, stating that black patients often receive substandard care. Adebowale, who has held senior health roles for over two decades, believes his mother's experience reflects broader issues within the NHS. NHS England acknowledged the need to improve access and tackle inequalities, with plans to address these in the upcoming 10-year health plan.
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