

Medical Libraries and the Provision of Health Information Services in Nigeria: Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper gave an overview on the role of medical libraries in the provision of health information services in Nigeria in line with the sustainable development goals as it relates to health and well-being of individuals and the nation. Various roles that can be performed to ensure the realization of health agenda in the SDGs were well articulated in the paper.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The method adopted was contextual analysis that involved reviewing of materials from publications, texts and the internet.

Implication: The position of the paper remains that medical libraries occupy a central position in the actualization of the sustainable development goals as it relates to the health and well-being of the human race.

Originality/Value: The paper concludes that in spite of the place of health information provision and utilization in the actualization of SDGs, there are still challenges that may limit the extent that librarians/libraries can contribute significantly to the full realization of the SDGs, therefore medical libraries/librarian should be well repositioned to ensure that they take library and information service delivery beyond the physical walls of the library

Keywords: Medical Libraries, Health Information, Information Services, Nigeria Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Paper Type: Conceptual research

1.0 Introduction

Information no doubt has been acknowledged as the driving force for all round development. Different people utilize variety of information for the actualization of their dreams in life. Different kinds of information such as agricultural, business, political, educational and health information are usually provided and utilize for all round development. Access to relevant health information is essential for helping people to take good decisions to enhance their health and well-being (Anyaku & Nwosu, 2017). Provision of timely accurate and relevant information is vital to the sustainability of any meaningful development programme both in developed and developing countries (Ariole, Nwaigwe & Anyalebechi, 2017). Whitney, Keselman and Humphreys (2017) states that:

Relying on libraries to identify, organize, and provide easy public

access to high quality, understandable health information can make health literacy interventions move scalable and suitable. For individuals who are self-motivated to improve their understanding of health topics, organized libraries of high quality health information, whether digital or physical, greatly simplify the search for relevant information.

Health is very important in people's lives and access to sound health information for quality health care provision should be guaranteed by teaching hospitals since their users need information resources and services to train and develop in their different specialties of the medical field (Okeke, Eze, Eze and Asogwa, 2017). Health

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communication can help raise awareness of health risks and solutions by providing the motivation and skills needed to reduce these risk (Anatsui, 2014). Health and well-being is however, high on the public library agenda. Libraries have a huge asset in the community space that they provide, which can be key to leveraging health and social care partnership and support (Hicks *et al*, 2010). Health information is critical in health care delivery and health promotion, as it provides the direction and rationale for positive health behaviours, facilitates efficient treatments, and enhances proper decisions on health matters (Kreps, 2005 as cited in Ezema, 2016).

Buse and Hawkes (2015) citing United Nations, noted that global health is everyone's concern, and the proposed SDGs have moved the world from a focus on the poorest countries, to an approach that is universal and equitable- this implies, that the global health community should be concerned about the health of everyone, including the marginalized in middle- and high -income countries. Librarians should wake up and make their impact felt in this global move of making the universe a better place (Amaechi, Benson, Dike & Okere, 2016)

The library is crucial to the realization of government policies at any level and by implication occupies a central place in the realization of SDGs (Ariole, Nwaigwe, and Anyalebechi, 2017). Benson, Anyalebechi and Amaechi (2015) noted that health is wealth and the greatest wealth a nation have is a function of how healthy the citizen is. Robust and well equipped public health services are the backbone of a healthy system, if it is expected to achieve the ambitious targets that SDGs sets out (A Civil Society Report, 2017).

Every dimension of sustainable development is hinged on the healthy state of the citizen and the healthy state of the citizen defines the rate of social economic and technological development. Health is well placed in the SDGs (WHO, 2017). Health is integral to sustainable development of any nation. Provision of health information is a necessity in the actualization of SDGs. There is hardly any sphere of life that does not have the need for information, neither is there any government that thrive in the world without utilizing information (Ariole, Nwaigwe, & Anyalebechi, 2017). The SDGs process offers an opportunity to reimagine global health and its centrality to sustainable development (Buse and Hwakes, 2015).

It is in line with the above, that the paper is focused on the role of medical libraries in the provision of health information services in Nigeria in

line with the sustainable development goals as it relates to the health and well-being of individuals and the nation. The specific objectives are, to:

- i. discuss the role of libraries in the provision of health information (HI);
- ii. highlight on the rationale for health information services in the realization of SDGs;
- iii. discuss the justification for medical libraries participation in the provision of health information services;
- iv. highlight on the expected roles of medical libraries/Librarians in provision of health information services in Nigeria;
- v. suggest strategies for effective provision of health information services;
- vi. highlight on the role of technology in the provision of medical information; and
- vii. Identify challenges to provision of health information services.

2.0 Conceptual Analysis of Key Terms

The basic key terms used in this study are explained in this section as follows:

2.1 Health Information

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) (2005) as cited in Mohammed and Abule (2014), define health information as "any information whether oral or recorded in any form or medium, that was created or received by health care providers, health plan public health. Nwafor-Orizu and Onwudinjio (2015) defined health information as that knowledge, facts and news generated from various sources necessary for good physical and mental condition of human beings. It encompasses the continuum extending from the specific information needs of patients to a broader provision of health information for the lay user (Wasike and Tenya, 2013). Patrick and Koss (1995) as cited in Uzoagba, Egneti and Onyam, (2017), sees health information as any information that enables individual to understand their health and also enable health-related decision to be taken for themselves or their families Uzoagba, Egneti and Onyam (2017) citing Lippeveld (2001) described health information as the "*foundation*" for better health, as the "*glue*" holding the health system together, and as the "*oil*" keeping the health system running.

2.2 Health Information Access

According to Anyaoku and Nwosu (2017), health information access is the patient's ability to

identify and obtain relevant, accurate and suitable information to satisfy health information needs. Health information dissemination refers to all processes aimed at educating, enlightening, informing or transmitting to the people, health issues that are of benefit to them (Okafor *et al*, 2016). Nannonno and Nanono (2018) citing Anyaoku and Nwosu (2017) sees health information access as the patient's ability to identify and obtain relevant, accurate and suitable information to satisfy health information needs. Access to health information should be timely relevant, accurate, and authoritative for the use not to suffer serious health consequences (Wasike and Tenya, 2013).

Health information is about having the requisite knowledge which enables one to make the right decisions concerning health issues. It relates to those pieces of information that will make the user have physical and emotional stability. It contains such information as sanitation rules, and regulations (environmental cleanliness), family planning, disease control, drugs, immunization, location of good hospitals and clinics, laboratory. It also includes news about international bodies and agencies responsible for global health activities such as world Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) (Uhegbu, 2007). Health information is a powerful vehicle for improving the health of a community and it highlights both the existence of problems and opportunities for improvement.

2.3 Medical Libraries

Libraries are often considered a mainstay institution within a community in providing both physical and virtual space. The physical presence of library continues to help strengthen social bonds, community identity and helps peoples get to know one another within the community (Leung, Flaherty, Rudd & Toumbourou, 2016).

Medical library by definition is an institution that acquires and preserves recorded knowledge and making it available for medical clients (Whoever in need of medical information) (Ojo, 2015). The medical library since its existence has served the health workers in every aspect both in the training stages and the practice stage and not forgetting the research stage (Uzogba, Egnetic and Onyam, 2017). Medical library belongs to the first group of special libraries which is the group that deals with special subject. As a special library, it is established to serve the medical practitioners, medical students and other people who wish to carry out a research in the field of medicine (Okeke, Eze, Eze & Asogwa, 2017). Medical libraries are as

important as the health information which they provide and there is obviously a growing demand for health care information by all (Ugwuona, Eze & Oyovwevotu, 2016). Whereas, a medical Librarian, is a professional who holds a bachelor degree in a medical related course and a master degree in library and information science from a recognized university (Ojo, 2015).

3.0 Overview of SDGs

The SDGs, a global agenda was adopted in 2015 by member states of the United Nations. The SDGs consist of an ambitious set of 17 goal and associated targets pursued through national action and international cooperation. A fundamental target of the SDGs is the concept of "leaving no one behind" (Blampied *et al*, 2018). Sutart and Samman (2017) as cited in Blampied *et al* (2018) pointed out that the leave no one behind agenda is not only about ensuring that the minimum absolute standards of living in societies are met, although this is vital, especially in countries where large swathes of people continue to live in deprivation. Rather, the concept is explicitly relational in the sense that people who are left behind are deliberately prioritized or targeted such that they progress faster than those who are better off.

The SDGs Agenda responds to the compound challenges faced by the world, i.e., many societies have experienced a rise of inequality even as they have achieved economic progress on average, hence the SDG Agenda is broader and more complex than the MDGs (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015).

4.0 Rationale for Health Information Services towards Actualization of Sustainable Development Goals

Provision of health information has the potency to propel healthy society. As pointed out by Nannonno and Nanono (n.d.), health information provision is seen as a major aspect that facilitates effective health information access in the community. For instance, both the health professionals and members of the community who are the consumers of health services need health information services provision for healthy society.

The role that health information can play in improving healthcare has been recognized for a number of years (Nwafor-Orizu & Onwudinjo 2015). Health information service provision is seen as a major ingredient that facilitates effective health service provision in a community (Mohammed & Abule, 2014). Inability to access and use accurate health information effectively can directly affect the health and safety of the users (Wasike & Tenya,

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2013). Anatsui (2014) posit that when health is compromised one cannot synchronize the management team to achieve national and organizational goals. Health information dissemination is intended to improve health awareness or information at their disposal such that they can live much healthier lives, shaped by informed choices they make (Okafor *et al*, 2016). Benson (2016) averred that expectations are high that library and information centres (LICs) and information practitioners with contribute significantly to the full realization of the SDGs

Libraries are sources of quality health information. They can provide access to a range of authoritative materials in the form of books, specialized journals, and monographs on a range of health issues that are potentially useful to patients (Anyaoaku and Nwosu, 2017). Ariole, Nwaigwe and Anyalebechi (2017) maintained that special libraries have a lot of roles to play towards the realization of SDGs through the provision of timely and accurate information to the citizenry. In other words, special libraries are seen as essential ingredient for the full realization of the SDGs.

The SDGs being interdependent in nature requires actions at all levels to attain the development outcomes (A Civil Society Report, 2017).

5.0 Justification for Medical Libraries Participation in the Provision of Health Information Services

Nigeria's rural areas suffer from inadequate information access, with major contributors to this deficit being high levels of poverty, irregular power supply, and in turns, inadequate electronic communications access (mobile, Internet) (Ezema, 2016). Access to effective and efficient healthcare services without any difficulty is one of the essential parameters to consider for a country's sustainable development (Perera, 2009). Ariole, Nwaigwe and Anyalebechi (2017:133) painted a very pathetic scenario that justifies why medical libraries should be at the forefront of providing health information services towards the realization of the SDGs. They stated that:

Over the decades, the global world, Nigeria inclusive, have been in the business of designing life changing initiatives that are meant to impart positively on the lives of the people. However, as in most cases, especially in the developing countries, it is clear that these initiatives hardly see the light of

the day, in some cases not fully realized. The failure of these programme or initiatives could be the apathy towards information provision and utilization, which no doubt underscores the relevance of information of global initiatives or agenda.

Unarguably, lack of access to health information is a problem because this might create a vacuum in patients understanding of their diseases and ultimately affect their perception of their capability to manage these diseases (Anyaoaku and Nwosu, 2017). According to Okafor *et al* (2016), sustainable health services anchored on adequate health information dissemination and community involvement will guarantee easy access to acceptable and affordable health care services at preventive, curative, rehabilitative, promotional and emergency levels.

Ibegwan (2013) asserts that libraries such as medical libraries play an important role in the dissemination of health information and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. This is because medical libraries can reach out to vulnerable communities by making health information accessible at the point of need. Ugwuona, Eze and Oyovwevotu (2016) contends that since medical libraries are concerned with information that have direct impact on life, they should be seen championing and contributing to the letters of health ethical issues, best practices and guidelines, including the presentation in health information packages.

Eysanbch *et al* (2002) as cited in Sokey and Adisah-Atta (2017) posit that low quality and credibility of health information may negatively influence the health status of individuals who use that information.

6.0 Role that Medical Library can Perform towards the Realization of Health Agenda in the SDGs.

- i. **Partnering with health workers in providing health information services:** library and information practitioners can contribute significantly to the provision of health information services through sustainable partnership with health workers. As noted by Ekere and Benson (2017), the library can help in the dissemination of health information to the society and rural dwellers in particular. This to them, will contribute towards achieving and ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Medical Librarians in collaboration with community libraries can partner with Rural Health Workers (RHW) to ensure that health-related information are provided to rural dwellers in line with goals 3 of SDGs towards ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all. Benson (2016) posit that in this era of globalization, there is an urgent need for library and information professionals to collaborate and partner with other stakeholders in economic and social development of Nigerian Society. Through sustainable partnership, it would be easier to reach out to wider community and the more the people are adequately armed with strategic health information, the healthier the society. Benson, Anyalebechi and Amaechi (2015) averred that they can partner with Rural Health workers (RHW) and medical practitioners.

ii. **Organizing health talks and seminars:**

Library and health workers can collaborate in organizing health talks and seminars for people dwelling in rural and urban areas. They can provide health literacy services through health talks and seminars through the health talks and seminars members of the society can be avoided and treated as well. In other words, health talks and seminar is a platform for equipping the people with health knowledge that would make them live healthy and also make the world a better and healthier place to live

iii. **Provision of health information sources:**

Medical librarians by reason of their day-to-routine activities are always abreast of health-related information. To play a significant role in the full realization of the SDGs as it affects health, Medical librarians can provide health information sources to those residing at the rural areas. In other words, medical libraries have the responsibility of providing health information to rural dweller. No doubt, rural dwellers who may be in dire need of health-related, information do not usually have access to information sources.

iv. **Provision of Strategic Health Information Services (SHIS):**

Medical Libraries in order to ensure that SDGs agenda as relating to health is actualized, they should take practical and pragmatic effort towards ensuring that strategic health information services (SHIS) are provided to the rural dwellers.

v. **Provision of information on how to access essential medicines:**

The medical libraries and librarians through sustainable partnership can to provide information on how the citizens could access essential medicines.

vi. **Provision of specific health information on family planning:**

As pointed out by HP+ Policy

Brief (2017), investing in family planning is a necessary step for achieving many of the SDGs, for instance, voluntary family planning programs play an important role in reducing fertility desires and enabling couples to realize their reproductively rights and intentions. Medical libraries can provide information on affordable access to vaccines and medicines for disease primarily impacting the developing world.

7.0 Strategies for Effective Provision of Health Information Services

Collaborative Approach: Okeke, Eze, Eze & Asogwa (2017) recommend that the medical libraries should engage in more collaborative activities to pull their resources - together interlibrary loan, forming repositories of the medical libraries etc so as to improve their resources and services for better health care services in the area. Even, the SDG Agenda calls for a renewed global partnership whereby today's government must coordinate with a broad spectrum of actors, such as multinational businesses, local governments, regional and international bodies, and civil society organizations (SDSN, 2015).

Engaging in resources sharing: According to Okeke Eze, Eze & Asogwa (2017), most medical libraries do not have the adequate resources implies that they are not cooperating as required. They suggest that medical libraries should form an avenue of sharing their resources locally since they are all in one state as this will uplift the standard of whenever, resources each medical library has as well as boost access to health information with a modest effect and less expenses. Engaging in resources sharing will help in ensuring effective provision of AIS to rural dweller.

Application of ICT: we are a technological driven society and we cannot afford to use analogue approach in providing health information services in contemporary society. app noted by Ojo (2015), for quality library services, medical librarians should give priority to application of information technology if they are to efficiently perform the role of information provider.

8.0 Roles of Technology in the Provision of Medical Information

As information becomes one of the key resources for any activity, the role of mobile technology-based ICT services is becoming more significantly for their users (Perera, 2009). Ugwuona, Eze & Oyovwevotu (2016) posit that medical libraries could as well manage networks of knowledge resources and centres and act as a hub

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to support access to health information since communication and sharing knowledge are integral part of their activities. Moreover, advances in information and communication technology (ICT) provide a new platform for health information dissemination in the form of mobile health (m-health) information (Ezema, 2016).

Medical libraries perform their operations and services more efficiently, through effective application of information technology (Farahi & Gandhi, 2011). In this 21st century and with the coming of the digital age and its internet and other telecommunications developmental changes, there has been a great impact on information access, storage and retrieval (Uzoagba, Egneti and Onyam, 2017).

ICT would have great potentials in playing important and key roles to support global economical, social, and environmental sustainability, which wait for the relevant discovery based on global and multi-disciplinary efforts (Wu, Guo, Huang, Liu and Xiang, 2018). ICTs could be the key catalysts to all of the sustainable development goals (Wu et al, 2018). The internet is very useful for health information dissemination and guidance and also provides needed information that is up to date (Uzoagba, Egneti and Oyam, 2017).

9.0 Challenges to Health Information Provision

In spite of the place of health information provision and utilization in the actualization of SDGs, there are still challenges that may limit the extent that librarians/libraries can contribute significantly to the full realization of the SDGs. The challenges among others, include:

Lack of fund to organize seminars: library and information practitioners, especially those in the medical libraries lack the finance required to organize talks and seminars for the rural dwellers. In which case, this would limit the extent to which health information services can be provided.

Low level of ICT Literacy: The ICT-driven society is where we undeniably found ourselves; however, the level of ICT compliant among rural dwellers in developing countries is still low. Medical librarians could have exploited the ICTs technologies and social media platform to provide health information services to rural dwellers, but this is not the case.

Lack of access to electronic information: Access to electronic information is a major challenge in the rural areas due to irregular power supply and low Internet bandwidth, compounded by high levels of poverty among the rural dwellers, making it difficult for them to purchase mobile phones (Ezema, 2016).

Conclusion

Medical libraries of all types of libraries stands out as most relevant information centres that could reform citizens with social ailments. The citizens must also be encouraged to access the services of medical libraries as have been explained and become literate on their health matters.

The study has shown that medical libraries are relevant to the full delivery of the SDGs, especially, the goal 3 of the SDGs which focus on health and wellbeing of the citizenry. Therefore, medical libraries/librarian should be well repositioned to ensure that they take library and information service delivery beyond the physical walls of the library to the citizen in whatever form and means since "health Is Wealth"

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