

Issues Militating against Effective Provision of Medical Library Services in Federal University Teaching Hospitals in South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: This study was carried out to examine the issues militating against effective provision of medical library services in Federal University Teaching hospitals in South-East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 1089 Undergraduate students. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire and observation checklist. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data.

Findings: The findings envisaged that lack of skills on the part of the staff, Lack of access to electronic resources, Lack of necessary technology for accessing on-line resources, and inadequacy of printers and photocopiers for users in the medical libraries among others are some of the issues militating against the effective provision of medical library services.

Implications: Suggested solutions to issues militating against the effective provision of medical library services in federal university teaching hospitals include informing users on the usefulness of library services, availability of regular, current and up-to-date information resources, teaching users how to access, evaluate and make use of information sources, training and retraining staff to acquire the necessary skills needed for efficient performance and providing adequate technology for accessing electronic resources among others.

Originality/Value: It was recommended that medical libraries as a matter of urgency should make plans to market the library services through posters, fliers, bookmarks etc thereby bringing to the knowledge of current and prospective users the services and resources available in the libraries. Secondly, sponsoring the library staff to workshops, conferences and trainings will help encourage them to acquire the necessary skills needed to perform effectively and efficiently in the health care environment and also to acquire the information materials their users may need.

Key Words: Medical Libraries; Teaching Hospitals; Library Services.

Introduction

Medical libraries are established to provide services and information resources to support and advance mission to patient care, research and bio-medical education for health institutions. The role of the library is strategic and pivotal for the success and growth of the enterprise. Abels, Gogdil and Zach (2002) stated that whatever be the future, the services of information provision

will continue to be an essential instrument of human welfare. Similarly, Margetson (2002) also recognizes the importance of dynamic access to information. Edoka (2000) on his part avers that the entire human and material resources in the library are put in place at a considerable expense for the overall purpose of effective services to the library users, he recapitulated that the modern library anticipates the expectation of its users and positively

provides resources and services to fulfil them. In the light of this statement, several studies have found that it costs about five times as much in time, money, and resources to attract a new user as it does to retain an existing one (Nauman, 1995 in Ugboma, Ibe, and Ogwude, 2004). The library is therefore challenged to maintain high levels of service, awareness of customer expectations and improvement in services and products (Ugboma, Ibe, and Ogwude, 2004).

In order to deliver effective and efficient services as expected by the users, the library will first of all carry out a needs assessment study. Rouda and kusy (1995) describe Needs Assessment as a systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be in association with organizational and/or individual performance. In needs assessment, the library assesses the user community and identifies the services, resources and programmes required by the community and then formalize plan in the form of objectives for a particular period (Palmour, 1980). These objectives describe as explicitly and concisely as possible the philosophical understanding of the library services that it tends to provide in the community for which it has been established. Edoka (2000) adds that the nature and intensity of the services vary with mission of the library and the type of its users.

The results from needs assessment could be used in a variety of situations:

- Commencing a strategic planning process
- Determining change in a user community
- Making changes in a library's collection, services, etc.
- Determining adequacy of facilities, technology, etc.
- Establishing satisfactory staffing patterns and library hours.

When the needs assessment is done, the library will use the information obtained to define the role of the library in the community (Palmour, 1980). This step involves comparing the services the library could provide, and the results of the needs assessment with the resources available. With this step, the services the library can actually provide are listed. Bearing this in mind, knight (2002) pointed out that needs analysis and

establishing of roles is not an end in itself but instead must become an input to planning process that guides future provision of information resources and services. Some problems noted to hamper the provision of medical library services include:

- Personnel with inadequate medical knowledge, the health care environment, medical terminology and information needs of the medical/health care professionals. Oluwakuyide (2010) noted that the medical librarianship in Nigeria lacks a well established tradition. Service therefore is not usually based on expertise but rather on the individual's ability to apply imagination and initiative in learning on the job. Wang, et al (2006) observed that medical librarians in china are not eager to take initiatives both in providing information services for decision making leaders and in keeping abreast of the update information. The result of this scenario is low frequency in the use of the libraries because the library staff are not competent. Furthermore it could lead to waste of users' time during information search. Kinengyere (2008) opines that for medical libraries to be able to cope with the challenges in the information world today, they need qualified personnel. Just knowing how to use the internet, and to do a literature search would not be enough for today's medical librarian. With digital libraries and websites emerging, medical librarians require added skills such as web developers, systems analysts and programmers. There are still very few librarians with such qualifications.
- Non familiarity with the medical library services such as current content, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Document Delivery Services (DDS) etc. one of the major reasons why this is so according to Cimpl (1985) is that medical professionals' free time usually falls between 10pm and 8am when most libraries are closed. Other reasons why the medical library users do not know what the library has to offer as suggested by Scura and Davidoff (1981) is that traditional library services take more time and extraneous or unusable information may result from the visit.

- Lack of skills needed to locate and retrieve information by medical library users has also been observed to hinder effective medical library services. Oluwakuyide (2010) noted that Most of the students probably come in contact with a large, well-organized library for the first time when they enter university and thus lack knowledge of how to use it.
- Proliferation of literature in the medical sciences is another factor posing a threat to the provision of effective medical library services. In developing countries like Nigeria, the medical libraries can only afford to subscribe to a small fraction of the periodic title published in the field. Hopes of readers are raised by compilation of fine reading list but are dashed to the ground because of unavailability of relevant literature (Oluwakuyide, 2010). Ugah (2007) noted that the advancement of knowledge is made possible through research by scholars in all fields. Coupled with this is the fusion and fragmentation of disciplines and knowledge. As these break down into smaller segments, the scholarly literature becomes more specialized. In addition, there are thousands of diverse information packages, e.g., journals, books, magazines, and newspapers, being turned out by an ever-expanding publishing industry. The electronic media also produce vast volumes of information. As the literature continues to expand, there is a corresponding proliferation of secondary sources, such as indexes and abstracts, which are produced to help control the flood of primary literature. Akiode (2005) observed that these vital indexes and abstracts are sometimes months out of date. The problem here is that both the library and users are overwhelmed with the ocean of information most of which are either redundant or too voluminous to handle.
- Inaccessibility to up to date information in schools and places of work. The medical library's success depends on the availability and access to timely up-to date information because of the nature of clientele they serve. However, kinengyere (2008) stated that, doctors in Africa had very limited access to up-to date information about combating disease, until a few years ago when stakeholders started using ICT to access information. Njongmeta and Ehikhamenor (1998) also noted that health professionals and students in third world countries lack access to libraries at their place of work and some institutions do not have functional libraries that support teaching, learning and research. On obstacles to the access and use of library services, Ugah (2007) avers that it is not enough that the services are available, or even bibliographically accessible; they must be physically accessible to those who need them.
- Inadequate budget/budgetary constraints. Oyelude and Ola (2008) stated that the need for budgets in libraries is increasingly important as government funding to public institutions continues to dwindle and the literature (books and journals) that must be managed continues to grow. The library users are more and more demanding for online resources and better services. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) added that, "the high rate of inflation in Nigeria and abroad undermines the acquisitioning capacity of libraries." Library materials are ordered from countries with a higher standard of living, and prices of books and journals are fixed for societies with higher levels of income. Foreign exchange restrictions, bureaucratic procedures with import licenses, and customs regulations are also among the challenges facing effective library services.
- Limited infrastructure to support ICT: as the population is increasing, there is a need to find ways of improving efficiency and quality of health care delivery systems in developing countries. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been identified as a vehicle with the

potential to improve the quality of health care systems as well as the efficiency of the health workers both in the developed and developing countries (Idowu et al, 2003). However, the realization of this potential is not without obvious hindrances. In a study carried out by Idowu et al (2008), they identified seven obstacles that hamper the use and successful implementation in health informatics as follows;

- Epileptic' Electric Power Supply
- Government's Attitude
- Cost of ICT Peripherals
- Telecommunication Facilities
- Internet connectivity
- Resistance to New Technology
- Lack of Maintenance Culture

Objective of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to examine the issues militating against the effective provision of medical library services in two federal university teaching hospitals in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- Identify the problems affecting the provision of medical library services in the two medical libraries.
- Suggest strategies for enhancing the medical library Services provided by the two medical libraries.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study encompasses the issues militating against the effective provision of

medical library services in Augustine Nnamani Medical library and the medical library at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital. However the study has following limitations.

- a. The study is limited to Augustine Nnamani Medical library and the medical library at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital.
- b. The sampled population includes only the library users of the two medical libraries.
- c. The study is limited to issues militating against the effective provision of medical library services.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 1089 undergraduate students. Sample size of 217 (20%) of the population was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaires and observation checklist. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data.

Analysis of Data

A total of 217 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents and 177 copies were returned and found useable, thus 82% return rate. Data for each research question was analyzed in order to ease comprehension of respondents' responses.

Table 1: Responses on problems affecting the provision of medical library services

S/NO	Problems affecting use of library	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
1	Some library staff are not courteous	6	3.4	37	20.9	55	31.1	76	42.9
2	Some library staff are not skilful	75	42.4	63	35.6	32	18.1	5	2.8
3	Some library staff are not knowledgeable	7	4.0	36	20.3	75	42.4	53	29.9
4	Library staff are not willing to help	6	3.4	15	8.5	83	46.9	69	39.0
5	The library environment is not conducive for reading, learning and research	8	4.5	19	10.7	54	30.5	91	51.4
6	The available space is not adequate	1	.6	16	9.0	70	39.5	88	49.7
7	The opening hours are not convenient	21	11.9	38	21.5	60	33.9	54	30.5
8	Reading materials are located and not retrieved easily.	26	14.7	42	23.7	77	43.5	24	13.6
9	The number of books and journals in the library are not enough for users	19	10.7	31	17.5	65	36.7	60	33.9
10	Desired print and non-print resources are not found in the library.	21	11.9	43	24.3	41	23.2	71	40.1
11	Users do not have access to electronic resources in the library.	80	45.2	84	47.5	6	3.4	6	3.4
12	The library does not have the necessary technology for accessing on-line resources.	86	48.6	77	43.5	7	4.0	5	2.8
13	Printers and photocopiers are not available for users in the library.	88	49.7	64	36.2	13	7.3	10	5.6

The results presented in table 1 indicate that the major problems encountered in the usage of library services in the two medical libraries under study are lack of skills on the part of the staff (78%), lack of access to electronic resources (92.7%), lack of necessary resources for accessing on line resources (92.1), and inadequacy of printers and photocopiers for users (86%). In both libraries, the respondents rejected the notion that the library staff are not

courteous, not Knowledgeable and not willing to help. Other statements are; the library environment is not conducive; the available space is not adequate, opening hours not convenient, Reading materials are located and retrieved easily, the number of books and journals in the library are not enough for users , and desired print and non-print resources are not found in the library were also rejected by the respondents.

Table 2: mean responses on strategies for improving medical library service.

S/N	Statements on strategies for improving the identified problems	SA	A	D	SD	N	Fx	Mean	Decision	Rank
1	The library staff should inform users on useful library service	113	61	2	-	176	639	3.63	A	2
2	The library should provide regular, current and up-to-date information resources	118	59	-	-	177	649	3.67	A	1
3	The library staff should teach users how to access, evaluate and use information sources	98	70	8	1	177	619	3.50	A	5
4	The library staff should be trained and retrained to acquire skills necessary to perform efficiently	106	43	8	4	161	573	3.56	A	4
5	The library should provide appropriate technology for accessing electronic resources	105	60	7	-	172	614	3.57	A	3
6	The library should provide more reading space for users	29	44	55	48	176	406	2.31	R	7
7	The library should extend the opening hours	34	37	59	45	175	410	2.34	R	6

The deduction from table 2 shows that in order to enhance library services, the users should be informed on the useful library services, Library should make available regular, current and up-to-date information resources, teach users how to access, evaluate and make use of information sources, train and retrain staff to acquire the necessary skills needed for efficient performance and provide adequate technology for accessing electronic resources. However, the statements on the provision of more reading space and extension of opening hours are in the negative.

Findings

From the findings of the study, as reported by the respondents, the following factors were deduced to be the problems affecting the provision of medical library services: Lack of skills on the part of the staff, Lack of access to electronic resources, Lack of necessary technology for accessing on line resources, and

inadequacy of printers and photocopiers for users in the medical libraries. These indicate that serious attention should be made in these libraries to correct the identified problems. The reason for under utilization and sometimes non-use of library resources are also attributed to non-availability of support facilities, poor maintenance culture and lack of skills on the part of the staff, despite the changes in the health information environment, problems associated with lack of skills abound. This finding was supported by those of Trivedi (2008) who in his study on computer and internet use by health care professionals in a rural medical college in India, opined that staff training and retraining are imperative, because without training, the vast amount of electronic health information resources would be under-used. The researcher found that in most cases, the chief medical librarian is the only one with the relevant skills and when he/she is not disposed to attend to the users, they are asked to come back to be

attended to. Furthermore, the respondents noted that lack of access to electronic sources is a problem. The researcher also observed that the reason may not be unconnected with the fact that the users sometimes could not access these resources on their own because they are not conversant with them. On the other hand, lack of access to electronic resources could also mean that users have limited access to the e-journals or on-line databases as the researcher observed in an interaction with a user during the course of distributing the questionnaire that some sites did not allow persons without the password to view the full texts of their contents.

Lack of necessary technology to access on line resources could again be linked to poor maintenance culture and lack of support facilities. Reprographic services are available in both libraries but the researcher observed that often they are grounded with only one photocopier working at a time, this situation wastes the users' time. The same is obtainable with the internet facilities though it is not the medical libraries' fault but the network either fluctuates, fails entirely when they are mostly needed or there is no electric supply to power the internet server. Idowu (2008) supports these findings when he listed the problems of ICTs as epileptic' electric power supply, government's attitude cost of ICT peripherals, telecommunication facilities, internet connectivity, resistance to new technology, lack of maintenance culture.

It was observed that all but two of the items as strategies for improving medical library services were rated positive. Strategies such as: the users should be informed on the useful library services, library should make available regular current and up-to-date information resources, teach users how to access, evaluate and make use of information sources, train and retrain staff to acquire the necessary skills needed for efficient performance and provide adequate technology for accessing electronic resources. If every staff is trained to acquire the skills relevant to work in a health care environment, they will in turn teach the users on how to make optimal use of the library resources, the librarians are in the best position to train the users to access, evaluate and make use of information sources better and more carefully than others. Emphasis should be laid on user orientation and instruction as Mohammadi, Moghaddam and Yeganeh (2008) opined that the

users need the ability to select the right information sources to use and discriminate among the selected, the best that is applicable to a particular search. Informing the users on the resources available through marketing or any other means were also part of the suggestions made by the respondents to improve on the medical library services.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The medical libraries must never be a break on the medical profession, nor should it simply accompany the progress of health care. It should be identified with the leading edge of medical development, always surprising the users, by offering services consistently better than that which is expected. The following recommendations were made based on the research findings:

- Use of library course should be inculcated in the curriculum of medical schools, proper orientation, instruction on how to use the fact finding tools and a tour of the physical library facilities will surely boost the confidence of the users when making use of the library resources.
- Sponsoring the library staff to workshops, conferences and trainings will help encourage them to acquire the necessary skills needed to perform effectively and efficiently in the health care environment and also to acquire the primary materials of information that their users may need.
- Finally, medical libraries as a matter of urgency should make plans to market the library services through posters, fliers, bookmarks etc thereby bringing to the knowledge of current and prospective users the services and resources available in the libraries.

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