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# APPRAISAL OF CONSUMER HEALTH INFORMATION SERVICES PROVISION BY MEDICAL LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** Consumer Health Information Services (CHIS) provide health information for utilitarian purpose to fight disease and for people to develop healthy life styles in communities. Although this is common in developed countries for a while now, it appears to best range in developing countries like Nigeria hence inadequately provided generally in spite of the presence of health institutions such as University Teaching Hospitals, Federal Medical Centres and College of Health Sciences that have the resources to do so. In this study, an appraisal of Benue State University Teaching Hospital (BSUTH medical library and College of Health Sciences (CHS) medical library in Benue State University, Benue State Nigeria is the focus, to determine the level of their awareness and provision of Consumer Health Information Services in Benue State Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. Questionnaire and observation checklist was used for data collection. The sample size was purposively achieved by selecting two major functional medical libraries in the area which are Benue State University Teaching Hospital Medical library and College of Health Sciences Medical library in Benue State University. Data collected was analyzed using percentages and weighted mean. The findings revealed that medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria are very much aware of the need to provide users with Consumer Health Information Services but they are incapacitated by inadequate experienced health librarians, lack of policy statement, among others. It conclude that although the medical libraries are aware of the need to provide Consumer

Health Information Services in the area and are doing so inadequately are insincere and unwilling to admit their challenges and recommend that policy statement on consumer health information services provision should be made by parent institutions for their libraries, experienced and adequate health librarians with necessary pedigree for providing consumer health information services should be provided among others to address the challenges.

**Keywords:** Medical libraries, Consumer Health Information Service, Benue State.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The production and dissemination of health information by health institutions is not the exclusive reserve of doctors or health practitioners alone but also of their information systems such as the medical libraries. From the earliest times, the busy schedule of professionals in Science and Technology fields could not allow them to pore over documents and sieve for information for utilitarian purpose and so, it was imperative to appoint one among them to be in charge of information provision in the information systems established in those fields (Kumar in Mngutyô 2011 & Edoke 2002). Similarly, today, medical practitioners such as doctors among others in medicine like professionals in Science and Technology have suffered the same fate. It is in this light that health information systems too have been established in health institutions. These health information systems have the right to provide health information to health professionals (such as the doctors among others for



effective service delivery) and to people in the communities where they are situated to develop healthy lifestyles.

However, in developing countries such as Nigeria and in Benue State in particular, libraries are never seen as places where people go to obtain utilitarian information except for educational activities (Mngutyô, 2017). This has affected medical libraries in performing optimally and has resulted into inadequate consumer health information services provision in health institutions there by culminating into unhealthy life styles among the people of the area thereby causing a lot of havoc as regards endemic and strange diseases such as malaria fever, typhoid fever, cholera and HIV/AIDS, Ebola, Lassa fever etc respectively. Again, it is unfortunate that this service is hardly associated with medical libraries of health institutions. Consequently, for most people, consumer health information services provision is doctors' affair and not medical libraries business. But from the foregoing, it is crystal clear that it is medical libraries' business as well and it is for this purpose among several others that they are established.

Before now many people in developing countries in the face of apparent inadequate local consumer health information services provision rely on Internet for Health Information as never before and are still doing so till date. The attendant problems however with it are determining the authenticity and relevance of the information, lack of information literacy to effectively explore and exploit Internet health resources by users, high cost of accessing online health information and lack of local content that is appropriate and applicable to seekers health information needs due to absence of locally developed databases.

Consequently, the use of Internet or Online Health Information by people in developing countries is often on general health issues rather than on peculiar local issues that affects them thus preventing communities from developing healthy lifestyles. The need for local consumer health information services provision by medical libraries is imperative and apt. The study therefore seeks to appraise the phenomenon in Benue State, Nigeria with a view to determining the cause of such abysmal state and offer dependable solution.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Medical libraries are avenues through which consumer health information services are provided to doctors and people generally to enable them use health information to fight diseases and to develop a healthy lifestyle respectively. These services provide current and relevant health information on health issues affecting the people in general in a cost effective manner on daily basis in order to promote healthy lifestyles and thus enhancing the health of the community.

It appears however that Consumer Health Information Services provision by medical libraries in College of Health Sciences in Benue State University and Benue State

University Teaching Hospital, Makurdi in Benue State is unsatisfactory. The resultant consequence is poor healthy lifestyles observed in the area leading to persistent endemic diseases such as malaria fever, typhoid fever, Cholera among several others, including strange diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola and Lassa fever. The fear of these diseases escalating beyond the present state is in no doubt apparent. For this, the study seeks to appraise consumer health information services provision in medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria with the view to offering dependable solution to the phenomenon.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To find out the level of awareness of Consumer Health Information Services by staff in medical libraries in Benue State.
2. To find out the types of Consumer Health Information Services offered by medical libraries in Benue State.
3. To find out the challenges of Consumer Health Information Services provision in medical libraries in Benue State.
4. To proffer solutions for enhancing the provision of Consumer Health Information Services by medical libraries in Benue State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of awareness of Consumer Health Information Services by staff of medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What are the types of Consumer Health Information Services provided by medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges of providing Consumer Health Information Services by medical libraries in Benue state, Nigeria?
4. What are the strategies for enhancing the provision of Consumer Health Information Services by medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Medical Libraries**

Medical libraries are libraries found in medical or health institutions such as general hospitals, ministry of health, medical centers, teaching hospitals, nursing schools, pharmaceutical companies, health research institutes, universities and related institutions (Anaeme, 2013). They are specialized institutions established to provide information resources to meet the information needs of health professionals and consumers in health institutions. Users of these libraries have access to online databases like Medline Plus, Pub med, HINARI a wide range of electronic resources, print and digital collections as well as print reference books. According to Wikipedia (2014) a medical library is designed to assist physicians, health professionals, students, patients, consumers and medical researchers in



finding health and scientific information to improve, update, assess or evaluate health care. Medical libraries can be traditional and techno-based in nature (Anunobi, 2013).

Walzer, Scott and Sutton 2000 in Anunobi (2013) stated that medical libraries' roles irrespective of approach include provision of current information to users in a quick and cost effective manner; Provision of balanced perspective on medical issues; Provision of alternative to formal learning in form of material support for continuing medical education; Provision of value services, which improves information delivery; Dissemination of health information and promotion of healthy lifestyles. Others are satisfying the health information needs of the community; Locating and assisting in the development of relevant information or materials; Pairing information outreach with other activities in which the populations already engaged in e.g. workshops, conferences, community events etc; and Integrating health information into ongoing programmes of the target population in the community, thereby empowering members of the health community. Prominent among the roles of medical libraries is the provision of consumer health information services.

#### **Concept of Consumer Health Information Services provision**

To start with, health information is defined as any information that enables individuals to understand their health and make health related decisions for themselves or their families (Patrick and Koss 1995; Deering and Harris 1996 cited in Anyaoku, 2014). It is also any information used to help make informed health-related decisions, whether at the personal, professional, managerial or political level. Health information is of two types: patient information, that is information needed to make informed decisions related to disease prognosis; and secondly, consumer health information, information needed to support a healthy lifestyle (Dahlen, 1993 in Anyaoku, 2014).

Consumer health information is information tailored and directed at a general audience rather than at individual patients. This kind of information is sought by consumers or patients without the need for mediation (or interpretation) by health professionals or librarians. This type of information can be found in a variety of print and media formats, and is made available where other general information is found such as the Internet and local public libraries. The sole purpose is to provide clear, straightforward information and facts for consumers. It aims at raising awareness of health and wellness issues generally. It is provided without much (or any) interpretation by health providers (or medical librarians, for that matter) but may be changing due to shared decision-making in medicine (HLWIKI CANADA 2015). HLWIKI CANADA, (2015) further stated that health information consumers are distinguished from patients in that they do not necessarily seek information based on a specific complaint, or illness.

Consumer health Information is often sought to increase one's overall well-being and health literacy skills. It may also focus on health promotion and how to navigate the health care system successfully. Today it is found in a number of media including social media. Local medical libraries can take advantage of this to disseminate local health information.

According to Medical Library Association (1996) Consumer health information (CHI) is information on health and medical topics provided in response to requests from the general public, including patients and their families in addition to information on the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment of disease. Health Information encompasses information on health promotion, preventive medicine, the determinants of health and accessing the health care system. This can be provided in medical libraries through Current Awareness Service (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) etc in collaboration with health professionals.

Cline and Haynes (2001) stated that more than 70000 websites disseminate health information. Perhaps it is because the Internet offers widespread access to health information, and has the advantages of interactivity, information tailoring and anonymity that is of comparative advantage that medical libraries in developing countries such as Nigeria have been tempted not to evolve their own local service to serve the people. Moreover, Onatola and Atulomah (2014) maintained that medical libraries in Nigeria do not have the required collection preferences that satisfy the academic, research or training interests or all of these interests for the benefit of their clientele. Most collections are not current and lack relevant local situations in content. And what more, a lot of medical librarians are still battling with the reality of transition from traditional to automated library system which accounts for the inadequacies associated with their modes of services delivery and quality of output and most of their parent institutions only pay lip services to library development. Anaeme (2013) also noted that though medical libraries are found in different institutions with different parent bodies' policies and needs, they face similar problems such as financial constraints, transitioning to an electronic environment, maintaining hybrid library and promoting effective patient care through information. Some of the major factors that militate against effective health information service provision generally may include inadequate health information service providers, lack of effective and virile library services, inadequate internet and ICT facilities, erratic power supply and poor health record management system.



### III. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was used for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Please see appendix on page 16. The sample size was purposively achieved by selecting two major functional medical libraries with potentials and resources to offer adequate and diverse Consumer Health Information Services in Benue State, Nigeria. The health institutions are Benue State University Teaching Hospital and College of Health Sciences. Consensus sampling technique was used because the number was small and manageable. Quite so, all the staffs were administered with questionnaires. Benue State

University Teaching Hospital medical library is located in Benue State University Teaching Hospital, Makurdi. It was established ten years ago, precisely in 2012 and has 5 staff. College of Health Sciences is located in Benue State University and was established in 2004. The College of Health Science has 10 staff. Out of the 15 questionnaires distributed to both institutions, 11 were correctly filled and returned representing 73% response rate with five from Benue State University Teaching Hospital Medical Library (BSUTHML) and six from College of Health Sciences Medical Library (CHSML).

### IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

**Table 1:** Level of Awareness of Consumer Health Information Services (CHIS) by library staff

S/N	Types of Consumer Health Information services	VGEA	%	GEA	%	LEA	%	NA	%
1	On symptoms	5	45.5	6	54.5	0	0	0	0
2	On diagnosis of disease	4	36.4	7	63.6	0	0	0	0
3	On treatment of disease	3	27.3	8	72.7	0	0	0	0
4	On health promotion	9	81.8	2	18.2	0	0	0	0
5	On preventive medicine	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0	0	0
6	On determinants of health	5	45.5	6	54.5	0	0	0	0
7	On accessing health systems	3	27.3	8	72.7	0	0	0	0

**Key:** VGEA-Very Great Extent Aware, GEA-Great Extent Aware, LEA-Low Extent Aware, NA-Not Aware

Table 1 shows the percentage responses and distribution of respondents on the level of Consumer Health Information Services (CHIS) awareness in medical libraries in Benue state, Nigeria. From the table, all respondents indicated very great extent awareness and great extent awareness with high percentage responses on all the items in the table while none

indicated low extent awareness and not aware with no percentage responses at all on the items in the table. This means that the staffs of these medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria are generally to a great extent aware of Consumer Health Information Services.

**Table 2:** Types of Consumer Health Information Services provided

S/N	Types of Consumer Health Information services	A	%	NA	%
1	On symptoms			-	
2	On diagnosis of disease			-	
3	On treatment of disease			-	
4	On health promotion	-			
5	On preventive medicine	-			
6	On determinants of health			-	
7	On accessing health systems	-			
	Total	3	42.9	4	57.1

**Key:** A-Available, NA-Not Available



From the data presented in table 2 above, out of the 7 health information services listed, 3 services representing 42.9% were available as indicated above while 4 services representing 57.1% services were not available. This

thereby revealed that Consumer Health Information Services are not adequately provided in medical libraries in Benue State.

**Table 3: Challenges to Consumer Health Information Services provision in Medical libraries**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	X	DEC	RANK
1	Inadequate information service providers	4	6	1	0	3.27	ACCEPTED	1
2	Lack of policy statement	4	4	2	0	2.90	ACCEPTED	5
3	Lack of funds	4	6	0	1	3.18	ACCEPTED	2
4	Lack of facilities(internet & ICT)	0	5	4	2	2.27	REJECTED	8
5	Lack of experienced health librarians	2	3	3	3	2.36	REJECTED	7
6	Internet provide such services via LC	0	8	1	2	2.54	ACCEPTED	6
7	Lack of current & relevant collection	3	6	2	0	3.09	ACCEPTED	3
8	Poor health record management	4	4	2	1	3.00	ACCEPTED	4

Table 3 shows the mean responses of respondents on challenges to Consumer Health Information Service provision in medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. The table indicated that apart from lack of facilities (Internet & ICT) with 2.27 mean score and lack of experienced health librarians with a mean score of 2.36, the other items are rated positively with the mean scores of 2.90 and 3.27 indicating that they are accepted as challenges to the provision of Consumer Health Information Services. This

revelation however contradicts the findings of observation checklist which shows that there are also no adequate experienced health librarians to carry out Consumer Health Information Services. This means that lack of experienced health librarians, lack of policy statement, lack of funds, already existing consumer health information services on the internet via Library of Congress and poor health record management are challenges to the provision of Consumer Health Information Services in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Table 4: Strategies of enhancing provision of Consumer Health Information Services**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	X	DEC	RANK
1	Adequate provision of information providers	8	2	1	0	3.64	ACCEPTED	1
2	Policy statement	5	5	1	0	3.36	ACCEPTED	3
3	Provision of adequate funds	7	3	0	1	3.45	ACCEPTED	2
4	Provision of internet facilities/subscription	4	6	1	0	3.27	ACCEPTED	4
5	Employment of experienced medical/health librarians	2	7	2	0	3.00	ACCEPTED	6
6	Floating of local website on internet for consumer information service	2	8	0	1	3.00	ACCEPTED	6
7	Provision of current, relevant and balance collection	4	5	2	0	3.18	ACCEPTED	5

Table 4 shows the mean responses of respondents on strategies of enhancing the provision of Consumer Health Information Services. The table indicated that all the items in the table are rated positively with mean score of 3.00 above. This means that all the items are accepted and agreed by respondents as strategies of enhancing the provision of Consumer Health Information Services in Benue State, Nigeria.

**V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Based on the findings and interpretations from the analysis, it is clear that medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria are to a great extent aware of Consumer Health Information Services. However, these services are not provided adequately by these libraries as revealed in table 2 data presentation and analysis. This explains why the services are not generally felt in the area. The challenges as revealed are lack of experienced health librarians, no policy statement, lack of funds, already existing consumer health services on



the internet via Library of Congress and poor health record management. It is surprising to note that facilities such as Internet & ICT that are usually observed to be a problem among libraries are not the case with these medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria. Nevertheless the libraries were discovered to be insincere to admit that they have inadequate experienced health librarians to provide such services. This is in agreement with Mngutyô and Amaakaven (2015) who stated that when respondents in questionnaire do not disclose their challenges in any situation is an indication that solution would be far from sight, and the issue will linger and that there would be no meaningful development. The strategies to enhance the provision of Consumer Health Information Services as revealed in table 4 are adequate employment of experience health librarians, provision of policy statement, provision of adequate funds, provision of internet facilities/subscription, floating of local website on internet for consumer information service and provision of current, relevant and balance collection. The strategies proffered here indicate that the respondents were economical in opening up with the truth.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that medical libraries in Benue State Nigeria are to a great extent aware of Consumer Health Information Services (CHIS). However, they are inadequately provided due to lack of experienced health librarians, lack of information providers, lack of funds, already existing Internet service and poor health record management, hence the services are not generally felt in the area. It is unfortunate that the libraries were insincere in admitting their challenges especially as regards inadequate experienced health librarians' availability.

#### VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion above, it is therefore recommended that:

1. Parent institutions of medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria should formulate policy statement on Consumer Health Information Service provision in libraries for the people of the State.
2. Adequate experienced health librarians with the pedigree of providing Consumer health information services should be employed.
3. Constant adequate funds should be provided for developing local databases and subscription to health databases and websites for the provision of Consumer Health Information Services.
4. Medical libraries in Benue State, Nigeria should train and retrain existing staff on Consumer Health Information service provision via workshops both within and outside the State so that the services can be adequately provided.

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#### APPENDIX I

Department of Library and Information Science Benue State University, Makurdi



Dear professional Colleague,

**FILLING OF QUESTIONNAIRE ON CONSUMER HEALTH INFORMATION SERVICES IN MEDICAL LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE**

We are your professional colleagues carrying out a research on the above named services. This is to enable us ascertain the level of awareness and availability of the consumer health information services in medical libraries in Benue state as well as identify the challenges faced in the provision

of the services and the strategies to enhance the provision of the services.

We therefore solicit your cooperation in honestly providing information to the questions posed in the questionnaire.

Please be assured that whatever information provided will be used strictly for the purpose stated above, while your identity is concealed.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

**James Mngutyô, Kate Agbo & Joseph Gbuushi**

**Section A: Level of awareness of consumer health information services**

To what extent are you aware of the following types of Consumer Health Information Services?

S/N	Types of Consumer Health Information services	VGEA	GEA	LEA	NA
1	On symptoms				
2	On diagnosis of disease				
3	On treatment of disease				
4	On health promotion				
5	On preventive medicine				
6	On determinants of health				
7	On accessing health systems				

**Key: VGEA-Very Great Extent Aware, GEA-Great Extent Aware, LEA-Low Extent Aware,**

**Section B: Types of Consumer Health Information services**

Please indicate the types of Consumer Health Information Services provided in the library.

S/N	Types of Consumer Health Information Services	A	NA
1	On symptoms		
2	On diagnosis of disease		
3	On treatment of disease		
4	On health promotion		
5	On preventive medicine		
6	On determinants of health		
7	On accessing health systems		

**Section C: Challenges to provision of Consumer Health Information Services in Medical Libraries**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
1	Inadequate information service providers				
2	No policy statement				
3	Lack of funds				
4	Lack of facilities(internet & ICT)				
5	Lack of experienced health librarians				
6	Internet provide such services via LC				
7	Lack of current & relevant collection				
8	Poor health record management				



**Section D: Strategies to enhance the provision of Consumer Health Information Services**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
1	Adequate provision of information providers				
2	Policy statement				
3	Provision of adequate funds				
4	Provision of internet facilities/subscription				
5	Employment of experienced medical/health librarians				
6	Floating of local website on internet for consumer information service				
7	Provision of current, relevant and balance collection				

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