CREATING AWARENESS IN INFORMATION SOURCES & SERVICES AMONG USERS OE HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN NIGERIA

BY

UMAR IBRAHIM, Ph.D)

Department of Library & Information Science,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Being a Commissioned paper delivered during special Nursing Book Fair, held at the school of Nursing Graduation Ground, A. B. U Teaching Hospital, Tudun Wada, Zaria, from 1st - 3rd December, 2004

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses four broad types of health information sources. Highlighting the problems of availability of health information resources in Nigerian medical/health institutions and libraries and information centers, the paper provides different kinds of information service that can be provided to health workers. The paper concludes by calling for adequate funding of medical/health libraries in the country. Also a call is made on the need to reposition the Health Management Information Systems established in the country.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Health, as the popular adage goes, is wealth. There is no doubt in the fact that the most precious thing after life is health. No wonder, *Caleb C. Colton,* 200 years ago observes that "There is this difference between the two temporal blessing-health and money; money is the most envied, but the least enjoyed; health is the most enjoyed, but the least envied; and this superiority of the latter is still more obvious when we reflect that the poorest man would not part with his health for money, but that the richest would gladly part with all his money for health". Similarly, *BEN JONSON* poetically wrote "O health! Health! The blessing of the rich! The riches of the poor! Who can buy thee at too dear a rate, since there is no enjoying this world without thee?"

Health as defined by to Microsoft Encarta (2002) is the general condition of the body or mind, especially in terms of the presence or absence of illnesses, injuries, or impairments. WHO categorically emphasized that health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but the physical, mental, and social well-being of the body.

Health is a broad area of concern that embraces preventive medicine, physical fitness and public health services. Other areas that are related to health include dieting, environmental sanitation- safe water supply, improved sewage disposal systems, pasteurization of milk, and sanitary control of food supplies.

The importance of health to individuals, nations and national developments cannot be under scored. The fact that health is associated to good fortune, happiness, comfort, security, welfare, safety, strength and vigour speak for all. *Pro Ligario Cicero (106-43B.C)* notes that "In nothing do men more nearly approach the gods than in giving health to men"

It is this drive and the belief of government that the health of the people is really the foundation on which all their happiness and all their powers as a state depend that make all governments of all nations take the issue of health seriously

Nigeria, like its counterparts in the world, and following WHO declarations has spent billions of Naira over the years in the health sector. In order to ensure good health for its citizens, successive governments of the federation have established primary health care centres, clinics and hospitals all over the country. Specialist hospitals, teaching hospitals as well as medical schools, nursing schools and research institutes have also been established. To cap it all, Nigeria has today an elaborate national health policy.

Although a vast amount of information exist, especially those internally generated by Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), States Ministry of Health (SMOHs), health departments, medical/nursing schools, medical associations, etc., it is sad to note that health workers in Nigeria like their counterparts elsewhere lack awareness of the existence of information resources in their profession. What is more disturbing is the fact that until recently, precisely 1998, when Health Management Information System (HMIS) was established no any concerted effort was made for the collation, processing and dissemination of information in this area. Even though one of the products of HMIS activities is the acquisition, processing and dissemination of information on Health in Nigeria publications, which comprise of states and LGAs health bulletins, policies, reform documents, health maps, e.t.c., the question is how far has this project gone?

This paper therefore is set to provide a comprehensive guide to both externally and internally published/generated health information resources. The paper goes further to suggest different kinds of information services that managers of Health Information System (HIS) can provide to users of the system - a kind of nourishing the nourisher. And also, a call was made for the adequate funding of HMIS so that it can effectively and efficiently collate process and develop comprehensive databank, and disseminate such to the entire health sector in the country. An enabling network environment should also be provided so that resources from different health sector could be easily shared, hence establishing strong co operations or even consortia.

2.0 TYPES OF HEALTH INFORMATION RESOURCES

Because of Information explosion in knowledge in general and in individual subject fields. Information sources have been categorized into four broad areas:

- Primary Sources of Information
- Secondary Sources of Information
- Tertiary Sources of Information, and recently
- Non-print Sources of Information

PRIMARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This represents the original reports of scientific and technical investigations. They usually form the bulk of Information sources in scientific communication and widely scattered. disconnected and unorganized. Primary sources of Information are very important because they report the latest available information, and over a period they become secondary and tertiary sources of information. The following constitute Primary sources of Information

i. Oral discussion
ii. Periodicals; scholarly journals, newsletter, review journals and trade journals
iii. Research reports
iv. Conference proceedings
v. Official publication

vi. Patents
vii. Standards
viii. Trade literature
ix. Theses and dissertations

SECONDARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

These are compiled from the primary sources and are arranged according to some definite order. They represent what Grogan (1982:15) call 'worked-over' knowledge. By their nature, secondary sources of information are often more widely available and in many cases more self-sufficient. Additionally, they not only repackage information from Primary sources, but serve as repositories of digested facts as well as bibliographic keys to the Primary sources of Information. Below are what form secondary sources of information

i. Textbooks
ii. Reference Books, e.g Encyclopedia, Handbooks, Dictionaries
iii. Indexes and Abstracts
iv. Government publications
v. Manuals

TERTIARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

These are publications that serve as guides to Primary and secondary sources of information. They are particularly useful to researchers because they brought together scattered information on a particular topic or field from different sources in one place. The following are example of tertiary sources of information

i. Directories and Yearbooks
ii. Bibliographies

NON-PRINT SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The development and availability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has today not only increased and broadened the impact of information on people, it has also placed vast information resources at their doorsteps. Their applications in Libraries and

Information centers have indeed continued to ease and promote quick and timely access to and transfer of information. Mentioned below are some examples of non-print sources of information

i. Electronic Information sources
ii. Health Information databases
iii. CD-ROM

The provision of all the information services can easily be done with the help of ICTs. Key reading, research register, table of content alerting and other news alerting can be provided through e-mailing. Discussion groups, reference linking, links with professional and electronic resource sharing can equally be done through networking. There is no doubt about the fact that ICTs have indeed made scientists' participation in Invisible colleges more real than before. It has also brought together, experts, professionals, scholars, e.t.c, and resources that are found scattered round the globe.

Today, there is in the area of medicine a new field called Telemedicine or Remote Health Care. It is the practice of medicine using telecommunications (for example, standard telephone systems, fibre-optic cables, satellite communications). This usually involves the diagnosis or treatment of illness by a doctor, who is not in direct contact with the patient, using two-way picture and sound transmission. It can also take the form of patient data being passed between general practitioners and laboratories and hospitals. As such, telemedicine places strong demands on telecommunication security to ensure that patient confidentiality is maintained. This no doubt goes to support the use of ICTs in Medical/Health Libraries and Information centers.

3.0 INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF HEALTH WORKERS

Libraries and Information centers are increasingly taking proactive steps in providing effective and efficient information resources and services that will satisfy the needs of their users. However, knowing fully that it is no more feasible to provide all the information needs of

user, Librarians and Information scientist have devised a number of scientific methods that will help the understand the information needs and seeking behaviour of users of information systems. Among these scientific methods is Citation Analysis, community/individual profiling.

4.0 PROBLEMS OF AVAILABITY OF HEALTH INFORMATION RESOURCES IN MEDICAL AND NURSING LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

The availability of Health Information Resources and Services in medical and nursing libraries in Nigeria has long been recognized as paramount in the dispensation of health services in the country. Indeed the importance of information dissemination in medical and health related areas cannot be overemphasized. However, like in all areas, there is serious dearth of information resources in the health sectors. This could be attributed to the following problems:

- ❖ Poor budgetary allocation to medical and nursing libraries in Nigeria
- ❖ Frequent high cost of production
- ❖ Short life span of majority of scholarly journal
- ❖ Authorship

5.0 INFORMATION SERVICE PROVISION IN MEDICAL AND NURSING LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

In order to provide proactive information services from the various information resources sourced by the librarian/information specialist, the provision of the following information services is suggested:

Community Analysis

Community analysis here refers to the overall process of identifying the mission, objectives and activities of health workers. Turfan (2004:3) adds the need to know the health sector's plans, demographic analysis and focus groups. Therefore, it is very important for the librarian or information specialist to understand medical/health information, their characteristics,

information needs of members in the health sectors and information seeking behaviour of health workers. In addition to these, he/she should also acquaint himself/herself with the kind of training, job analyses and descriptions, continuing professional education programmes and other relevant professional programmes.

Profiling

Closely related to community analysis is profiling. Profiling has to do more with the individual in the health sectors. The librarian or information specialist should make effort to know members individually and personally. He/she should collect specific details about each member. For instance, the librarian should attempt to find out how ambitious the members are, whether they have any career plans and the skills they have are up-to-date. As pointed out by Pantry and Griffiths (2003) information on specific individuals offers guidance on managing every stage of their career, whether they are new entrants to the profession, wishing to know how to get a foot on the ladder, an information professional in mid-career wishing to progress, or a candidate for a more senior position needing a view of the current state of the profession.

Personal Index Files (PIF)

Health workers, no matter what branch of medicine they belong are perpetual learners, especially in new developments. PIF is a system that allows the storing and retrieving of document or information under individual user name. Each concept of interest within a document is described by a single word or phrase call index term and these are grouped in an author index or subject index depending on whether they are concerned with the authorship or the text of the document. A subject index term may consist of a single concept (a primary term) or may have added to it a simple or complex qualifying phrase. All index terms irrespective of whether they are author or subject are stored and retrieved under an individual health user.

Sourcing Information

Sourcing information involves identifying, assessing, evaluating, and acquiring, different information resources from both internal and external environments of health sectors. This process is undertaken after determining the information needs of health workers because only those relevant information resources should be acquired. While information for health workers can be sourced from secondary information resources, such as books, journals, etc, health information should be documented through collecting information from professional societies representing a variety of disciplines, and soliciting information from other medical/ nursing institutions.

Therefore, the librarian /information specialist should pay particular attention to sourcing information such as notices for training programmes, professional meetings, conferences/ seminar/workshops, forth coming events, and job advertisements. Apart from the fact that information derived from these sources is most useful for professional development, it is likely that these sources will also provide information on the changing pattern of the profession. For instance in job advertisements, the current job analysis and description, required skills are always spelt out.

Managing Information for Health workers

It is significant to note that for any information system to be effective and efficient, information must be carefully and properly managed. At this juncture, it is interesting to note the effort of Federal Government in the establishment of Health Management Information systems (HMIS). The first National Health Policy (NHP) of 1998 recommended the establishment of Health Management Information systems (HMIS) units at the three tiers of governments. Sarki (2000:23) notes that one of the objectives of HMIS is to provide information for those who need to take action (policy makers), those who supply the data and the general public. Of course one

product that is expected form the activities of this system is the publications of information in the area of health in Nigeria. The Information for publication by this system should be collected from the federal, states and local government areas. Therefore publications and documents such as health bulletins, health policies, health maps, reform documents, e.t.c. are expected to be acquired by the system. One aspect of management that is very important in the provision of information for professional development is monitoring and evaluation. It is very important for the librarian to have some means of determining the influence/impact the information he supplies is making; whether it is really enhancing job performance and utilization of newly acquired skills. Feedback would always allow the librarian/information specialist deliver better information services

Current Awareness Services (CAS)

Health workers should be well informed on the current happenings in their areas. Demand for new skills, new innovations, practices, potentials of new and old technologies. utilization of current and emerging technologies should be communicated to them immediately. For instance Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) provides weekly Current Contents services of various publications. Also, Index Medicus, published since 1879 provides titles of all new publication in medicine, surgery and related areas. Most of these current contents are published frequently and distributed. Current Contents combine features, conference reports, regular columns, news items and diary of forthcoming events worldwide, subject index and an author address directory. These no doubt represent the perfect way to stay abreast of important issues and activities in the health sector. In providing Current Awareness Services (CAS), the librarian should try to involve everyone in the profession. He can capitalize on the experiences, creativity and popularity of the members of the professions to achieve this. Current Awareness Services (CAS) such as the following could be provided

Career Information:

This relates to information on job opportunities, recruitment agencies, e.t.c. The librarian should periodically give full details of priority services, job offers, including jobs not formerly advertised, with contract and permanent opportunities

Talk shows.

This is a situation in which the librarian should, from time to time, and using different criteria, invite members of the profession to give a talk on certain aspects of the profession e. g their experiences, difficulties and solutions. Closely related to this, is that the librarian should periodically organize lectures on key developments in the profession.

News group:

The librarian should try to identify people in the profession that are interested in current affairs with a view to bringing them together as news group. The group can then be used to source current information and happenings in the profession. The group can be encouraged to share such information with the librarian and the rest of the members of the profession.

Exhibition:

This is also another avenue through which current developments in a profession can be made known to the professional. New inventions, products, literature, etc can be shown to members during exhibition.

Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)

This type of services is usually targeted towards individual members of the profession. The librarian must have identified at the profiling stage individual information needs, career plans, aspirations and professional development plans. The librarian, after analyzing information from the different information resources sourced should direct relevant information to the right people in the profession through *news alert, mailing and personal contact.* Advice and

consultancy can equally be offered on individual basis. Confidential one-to-one advice on jobs, pay, terms and conditions, redundancy, CVs, interviews, equal opportunities, harassment, e.t.c. can be provided.

Significantly, the librarian after knowing individual needs should try to bring together those professionals that have one thing or the other in common. This, he can do through the establishment of ***discussion, innovation and collaboration groups***. For instance, British National Institutes of Health has since early 1960s been sponsoring what it called Information Exchange Groups (IEG), the aim of which is the free circulation of unreferred memoranda among members and the encouragement of informal comments

Bibliographic/Technical services

In this type of service, the librarian is supposed to teach users how to find out and use different kinds of bibliographic and technical information. Different Information systems for the processing and retrieval of information such as databanks, databases and library automation software should be taught to users. Internet usage, as well as important web site should be made known to users. For instance, www.mayoclinic. Org/health inf/ is a page that provides a gateway to some high quality online resources for health and medical information, similarly www.who.int/whosis is WHO Statistical Information System that provides health and health related statistical information

Indexing and Abstracting services

This is another very important information service that most of our libraries and information centers seem to be neglecting. Today there are lots of health information flying all over in daily newspapers, health magazines, general magazines, e.t.c. These need to be captured and repackaged, and indexing and abstracting service does exactly that. Therefore, Librarians working in health sectors need to be indexing and abstracting all publications on health form

newspapers, magazines, bulletins, e.t.c. A scrap book of publications in ephemeral sources will not be out of place

6.0 CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it is evidently clear that there exist vast and variety of information resources from which effective and efficient information services could be provided. However, the non availability of most of these resources and services in medical/health libraries is essentially attributed to lack of adequate funds. Therefore, the paper concludes that if adequate funds are made available to health/medical libraries, effective acquisition of variety of information resources can be made and proactive information services can be rendered. Finally, the paper calls for the repositioning of the only Health Management Information Systems (HIS) in the country.

REFERENCES

Binchan, R (2000) Meeting the Health Challenges of the 21st Century; Proceedings of Refresher Course/update in Post Basic Nursing Organised by the School of Post Basic Nursing Programmes A. B. U Teaching Hospital, Kaduna, from 18th-22nd September. Zaria SPBN,ABUTH

Grogan, D (1982) Science and Technology: An introduction to the Literature 4th ed. London Clive Bingley

Ibrahim, Umar (2004) libraries as tools for professional development of the community being a paper presented at the Nigerian library association (NLA) annual conference and AGM- "Akure 2004" held on the 20-25th June, 2004 at Solton international hotel & resort, Ijapo estate, Akure

Kale, R. (1994) "Health Information for Developing World." BMJ 309. Oct., pp939-942.

Lippeveld, T. Sauerborn, R and Sapivie, S (1997) "Health Information Systems – make them work". World Health Forum, 18pp176-184.

Microsoft® Encarta® Reference Library 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft

Morton, L. T (ed) (1977) Use of Medical Literature 2nd ed. London Butterworths

Oguntade, T.O., Oyibo, W.A. and Fagbenro-Beyioku, A.F. (2001) "Availability of Tropical Journals for Medical Research in Lagos, Nsigeria." Lagos Libraries 22(1&2) pp1-10.

Pantry, S and Griffith, P (2003) Your Essential Guide to Career Success. 2nd ed. http://www.lapwing. Org.../

Sarki, U.M (2000) "Health Management Information System" In Binchan, R (2000) Meeting the Health Challenges of the 21st Century; Proceedings of Refresher Course/update in Post Basic Nursing Organised by the School of Post Basic Nursing Programmes A. B. U Teaching Hospital, Kaduna, from 18th-22nd September. Zaria SPBN,ABUTH

Turfan, B (2004) Collection Development Management in Academic Libraries in the 21st Century. A paper presented during the British DFID Link visit at K. I. L. A. B. U. Zaria. 5th January