

An Assessment of the Need for Consumer Health Education, Information and Communication in Contemporary Society

By

Usoro Ekong HARRISON
Department of Physical and Health Education
Faculty of Education
University of Uyo, Uyo
Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

Consumer Health Education is the acquisition of knowledge and correct health information on the purchase and use of certain health product and services. Health information refers to the data and fact about health product and services that the consumer gets from media and people including professionals and agencies. A consumer is any person who makes use of product and services or information from another person to meet his or her personal needs. A consumer product is any tangible personal property which is distributed in commerce which is normally used for personal family or house hold purpose. Services are non-tangible in nature e.g. banking, telephone, hospital services etc. The need for consumer education is to enable the consumer knows how and where to buy required goods and services. This paper seeks to examine the need for consumer health education, information and communication in contemporary society. It is recommended that consumer education information and communication should be enforced to create answers and stimulate consumer's interest.

Keywords: Consumer Health Education, Health Information, Acquisition of Knowledge

Introduction

From the day we are born until we die, we are always consumers of different types of product and services. The list of what we consume, almost daily, is so long that we cannot mention them all but important among them are health services, transport services, water, food, drugs, toiletries, cosmetics, building materials, motor parts, clothing's and of foot wears etc. so we should not regard food, drinks, drugs alone as what we consume but it include all product and or commodity that we need to buy, obtain from a agency such as health facility, or product in order to satisfy our daily requirement (Akinsolla, 2006).

Akinsola (2006) also noted that most of the times, people consume goods and services without knowing their sources, or values or thinking whether it really worth what they have paid for in terms of the quality and quantity. There are many health product including a variety of goods and services in the manuals with that producers use all sort of advertisement and giggles to convince the unfortunate consumer. So consumers rather than fall victims to such enticing advertisement must learn to evaluate the various items being offered to them in attractive and subtle way s and make intelligent health decisions.

Experience have shown that all too often people see themselves as health consumers only when faced with physicians fee for service or a hospital bill. Each of it is confronted daily with myriads of choices that influences our health and welfare. Chanluangaco (2011) pointed out that we could lower our health risk by not smoking, by maintain exercise programme, by eating healthy foods and balanced meals and by learning to recognize and deal with stress. Another is that a lot of money is saved by not having to visit a physician.

It is clear that the field of medicine is growing so rapidly and also that consumer expectation are also so high and people believe that they must be a cure for everything. Because people believe that everything can be treated or cured, promoters of fraudulent cures have easy market to target. These promoters play on people fear, ignorance and gullibility. When people become more vulnerable these promoters offer their new cures. Hence consumer education is needed to protect the consumers of product and services in the market place (consumer safety bulletin (2007).

The public has become the victim of fraud, misrepresentation, deception, misleading and confusing advertisement and other selling tactics. Consumer health education provides the

information and understanding necessary for wise and intelligent decision in choosing and using product and service. The consumer has the right to safety and protection from hazardous goods, right to be informed and protected against fraudulent, deceitful or misleading informative, advertising and labeling. Also the consumer has the right to choose from a variety of products and serves at competitive prices as well as the right to seek redress whenever defrauded or incurred. Consumer health refers to the state of wellbeing of a person who uses information, products and services that will have direct effect on his or her health.

Consumer health is also define by as a state of wellbeing enjoyed by people who buy product and use services that research clean safe. Most government try to protect consumer health by offering disease prevention information and warnings about products and services that pose a risk to public health. The health of consumers according to Freimuth and Quinn (2004) represent more than freedom from disease. It protects the physical, social and mental wellness and aims to prevent illness. Effort to protect the public are also on food, drugs and product safety.

Consumer Health Education is the acquisition of knowledge and correct health information on the purchase and use of certain health products and services. Health information refers to the data and fact about health products and services that the consumer gets from media and people including professionals and agencies (Essenbach, 2000).

Health products refers to substance, materials or equipment prepared or manufactured for you to buy and use for the maintenance of health and the treatment of diseases of eyeglasses, BIp monitor, medicine, growing aids etc. health services refers to health information furnished, actions or procedures or work performed to help satisfy your needs and wants as a consumer e.g. medical and dental consultation and treatment from beauty parlor and barbers shop.

Reliable Source of Health Information includes: Health professionals, Government or Health Agencies such as Ministry Of Health, Food and Drug Agency, Educational Institution and Health Institutions. Unreliable source of Health Information includes: Customers and Superstition, Information based on ignorance, Commercialized health information and Paid health advertisement in media.

Objective of Consumer Education

- To assist the consumer in choosing better health product and services.
- Provide information regarding health product the consumer wish to buy and the health services the wish to avail themselves of.
- To help recognize reliable source of health information.
- To circle consumers in buying health products and services.
- To help chart, learn how to evaluate advertisement and understand the influence of advert on consumer buying habit.
- To help client seek medical services and avoid the danger of self-diagnosis and self-medication.
- To help clients understand the need to read and understand labels before buying health products.
- To help clients understand the characteristics of quacks, services and product.

Who is a Consumer?

A consumer is any person who makes use of products and services or information from another person to meet his or her personal needs. A consumer product is any tangible property which is distributed in commerce which is normally used for personal, family or household purposes. Services are not tangible in nature e.g banking, insurance, telephone, hospital service etc.

In Nigeria today, some individuals or organizations engage in quackery of some type in attempt to make profit rather than the concern for the health and wellbeing of the consumers. Consumers are bounded with all sort of health informing using false and discipline advertising in the media.

Quackery and health fraud is a serious threat to public health. Quackery is not just a medical problem. It is also a social problem, quack drugs mask or repress symptoms thus delaying proper diagnosis and treatment until the problem becomes serious. Many people are also duped with cost of quackery running into millions of naira.

A quack is a person who pretends to possess knowledge or information about the treatment of disease or illness. All people who are inadequately trained are quacks. Quacks are fake health practitioners whose motive is to make money, some have a little or no training, yet they claim to have skills or product with a curative power. Some are usually uneducated and Ignorant persons who understand little or nothing about health and medicine while some have some educational background but very limited knowledge of scientific research (Achal, 2005). Areas where quacks are common includes: Foods drugs cosmetics. Weight control, chronic problems e.g. cancer, arthritis, Antiaging, supplement and Faith healings.

Another area of concern under consumer health is self-medication

Okafor (2000) define self-medication as obtaining and consuming drugs without the advice of a physician either for diagnosis, prescription, surveillance or treatment. It is the act of taking drugs without the advice of qualified health care professional.

Okafor (2000) listed effect of self-medication include; wrong condition may be treated since there is no diagnostics, it can result to drugs resistance, it can lead to infertility, it can lead to low birth, weight of babies or death and it can lead to abortion or mal development of the baby or death. Over dosage with complication includes: drugs dependence, drug interaction which can lead to liver damage, can delay a visit and treatment y medical doctor until the condition become worse, e.g. of drugs use for self-medication include: antimalware, analgesic, tranquilizer victim supplement.

Consumer information

Koss (2000) defined information as a process fact or data. It is a wealth of knowledge about something such as food, drugs, which may be obtain from a source. Such source of information include information leaflet, internet source, food and drugs information centre, pharmacist, reference book, scientific journal, conferences and reviews etc.

Method used to disseminate information, education and communication to customers

- The use of public address especially mounted on a vehicle
- The mass media – radio, television, newspapers, town announcers
- Use of bill boards, posters, leaflet, handbills
- Use of role play drama
- Seminar
- Lecture/discussion

Consumer right and responsibilities

American journal of public health (2017) enumerated the right of the consumer to onclude the following:

The right to be informed: The consumer has the right to be protected against fraudulent, deceitful and misleading information and advertising. They have the right to know the fact about product in order to make good choices and intelligence decision.

The right to chose: The right to make choices and have access to a variety of product or services. The right to safety: Consumers have the right to be protected against harmful product or services thst can lead to illness or injury.

The right to be heard: The consumer has the right to speak out when they are not satisfied with product and services.

Right to seek redress: They also have to seek redress from him suffered by the consumer due to unsafe food or services by the vendor, seller or service provider and should be compensated.

Right to privacy and confidentiality: consumer has a right to privacy and confidentiality and client records and information should be kept secret.

Right to healthy environment: the environment in which product and services are produced is provided should be health and hygiene in order words the sanitary condition In which product and services are presented should be clean and hygiene.

An agency responsible for protecting the health of consumers includes:

Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Sanitary Inspectors, Ministry of Works, NAFDAC, Standard Organization, Nigerian Medical Association, Professional Association in Health, WHO, and UNICEF, ect.

Communication

Is the successful sharing of thought, feelings, ideas, information, ect to others through speech, writing, bodily movement, signals, print, or electronic media.

Health communication is the study and practice of commenting personal health information such in a public health campaign, health education, and between health provider and the patient or client.

The purpose of giving out health information is to influence personal health improving literacy.

- To increase knowledge and increases on health issues.
- To influence behavior and attitude toward positive health
- To encourage behavioral changes
- To demonstrate healthy practices
- To increase demand or support for health services
- To clarify misconception about health related services

Methods adopted by these bodies includes:

- Creating awareness among the public
- Educating the public about their right
- Orientation of the public on the existence of quacks, method they operate and the diagnose effect of this product on health consumers (communication strategies).

Strategies and method of communication of health messages and information includes:

Entertainment, mass media, television, radio, newspaper, internet, and interpersonal communication.

Qualities of intelligent consumers

- She must use reliable source of information
- Use drugs, medicine or health product properly
- Determine the needs for drugs and other product before buying them
- Must always ask question for clarification covering diagnoses and treatment
- She should learn to critically analyze advertisement to determine whether they are correct or not
- Be careful about drugs or product that claim to cure all disease
- Protect his health and that of the family members
- Protect your right

Need for consumer health education:

Unlike in the past when the family could produce all its need, today, individual and families buy nearly all their equipment for daily needs and the expose them to the influence of quacks. Due to high level of illiteracy in African countries, most consumers of product and services are ignorant of the effect of many harmful product being sold in open market, such as expired drugs, contraband cosmetic products, harmful food addictive et. Nowadays, consumers all of all ages and literarily level are presented with the problem of fake or harmful products e.g cigarettes, cosmetics and drugs(Achalu. 2005).

The high rate of chronic diseases in african countries and Nigeria especially today has increased patient, level of utilization of services of the quack and quackery. Many quacks go about hawking

fake drugs, which they advertise as magic panacea or all purpose remedies for HIV/AIDS, hypertension, pile, work, infestation, peptic ulcer, diabetes, infertility, impotency etc.

Consumer education is needed to protect the consumers and services in the market place. This is because the public has become the victim of fraud, deception, misrepresentation, misleading and confusing advertisement and other selling tactics (Akintola, 2006).

Quackery and fraudulent health practices are a serious health problem in Nigeria and other part of the world. Quackery has been defined as a fraudulent misrepresentation in the diagnosis or treatment of disease with the main motive of making profit. A quack is a person who practice quackery by pretending to possess knowledge and skill in the treatment and care of disease and illness

Okafor (2000) listed the following as need for consumer education.

- To enable the consumer to know his right
- To enable the consumer obtain the best value for his money
- To enable the consumer eliminate waste in consumption
- To enable the consumer know how and where to buy required goods and services

Conclusion

Consumer Health Education is the acquisition of knowledge and correct health information on the purchase and use of certain health product and services. Health information refers to the date and fact about health product and services that the consumer gets from media and people including professional and agencies. A consumer is any person who makes use of product and services or Information from another person to meet his or her personal needs. A consumer product is any tangible personal property which is distributed in commerce which is normally used for personal family or household purpose. Services are non tangible in nature e.g. banking, insurance, telephone, hospital service etc. The need for consumer education is to enable the consumer to know his right and to enable the consumer knows how and where to buy required goods and services.

Recommendation

- 1 Consumer education information and communication should be enforced to create answers and stimulate consumers interest.
- 2 Should ensure that manufacturer comply with set standard for the purpose for protecting the consumers.
- 3 Consumer's protection association on Nigeria should cooperate with government for the common interest of the consumers.
- 4 There should be proper funding for professional's health educator to enable them play their role.
- 5 Consumers should avoid patronizing the quacks or buying of adulterated product to safe life.

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