
**EVALUATION OF THE ROLES OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH LIBRARIANS IN PROMOTING HUMAN HEALTH:
ASSESSING THEIR POTENCY IN THE PROVISION AND UTILISATION OF MEDICAL LIBRARY RESOURCES
IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluated the roles of medical and health librarians in promoting human health, assessing their potency in the provision and utilisation of medical library resources in Nigeria. It highlighted that medical and health librarians play a pivotal role in the healthcare system by ensuring the availability and effective utilisation of medical library resources. It further noted that librarians contributions extend beyond traditional library services to significantly impact health outcomes through the provision of accurate and timely information. In the context of carrying out this study, several essential subheads were explored, such as the concept of a library, the concept of medical and health libraries, the concept of health librarians, and the concept of human health, among others. The study mentioned that information literacy training and provision of health information sources, among others, are some of the roles of health and medical librarians in providing adequate medical libraries in Nigeria. It further stated that 'facilitating access to current information' among others forms the role of health and medical librarians in effecting the utilisation of medical library resources in Nigeria. The paper concluded that medical and health librarians play a crucial role in Nigeria's healthcare system by ensuring access to and effective use of medical resources. Their responsibilities include curating essential information that supports evidence-based practice and improves healthcare quality. One of the recommendations made in the course of this study was that medical and health librarians should be encouraged to integrate and effectively utilise digital technologies and online databases in their services.

KEYWORDS: Medical, Health, Librarians, Human Health, Library, Resources and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Medical and health librarians play a pivotal role in the healthcare system by ensuring the availability and effective utilisation of medical library resources. Their contributions extend beyond traditional library services to significantly impact health outcomes through the provision of accurate and timely information. In Nigeria, the evolving landscape of healthcare demands a robust evaluation of how these professionals facilitate access to essential medical resources and support health promotion efforts. By evaluating their roles, one can better understand how medical and health librarians contribute to the advancement of human health in the country (Ogunyemi, 2017).

The significance of medical and health librarians in Nigeria is underscored by their involvement in the provision of specialised resources that are crucial for evidence-based practice. These librarians are tasked with curating and managing comprehensive collections of medical literature, databases, and other informational resources that support healthcare professionals in making informed decisions

(Oyeleke et al., 2018). The availability of these resources is vital for improving the quality of healthcare services and enhancing the capacity of health professionals to address various health challenges effectively (Ijeoma & Onuoha, 2019).

However, despite their critical role, there is a need to assess the efficacy of medical and health librarians in meeting the demands of the healthcare sector in Nigeria. Studies indicate that challenges such as limited funding, inadequate training, and insufficient infrastructure can impact their ability to provide optimal services (Ezeani, 2020). Understanding these challenges and evaluating how librarians navigate these issues can offer insights into enhancing their effectiveness and the overall quality of healthcare information services (Adewale, 2021).

Additionally, the utilisation of medical library resources is a key area where the roles of medical and health librarians are crucial. These professionals are responsible for facilitating access to up-to-date research, clinical guidelines, and educational materials that are essential for continuous professional development and patient care (Nwachukwu & Mbah, 2022). Assessing how effectively librarians promote the use of these resources can shed light on their impact on health outcomes and the efficiency of healthcare delivery in Nigeria (Ojo & Oladipo, 2023).

A comprehensive evaluation of the roles of medical and health librarians in Nigeria is essential for understanding their contribution to promoting human health. By examining their involvement in the provision and utilisation of medical library resources, as well as addressing the challenges they face, we can better appreciate their impact on healthcare outcomes and identify areas for improvement. This evaluation will ultimately support the enhancement of medical library services and their effectiveness in fostering a healthier population (Kanu & Ogbemudia, 2023).

CONCEPT OF LIBRARY

The word "library" comes from the Latin word "*liber*," meaning "book". The equivalent word for library in Greek and Romance languages is *bibliotheca*. A library is an assortment of books and other print and/or nonprint resources arranged and kept up for use in reading, consulting, studying, research, and other activities. A library is a real or virtual repository of information resources and services designed to serve the requirements of its patrons in the areas of education, information, culture, and recreation. A library was traditionally defined as a tangible collection of materials, mostly books and periodicals, gathered in one location for users to visit and peruse.

According to Bassey (2019), a library is an organised place for the retrieval of information for people. It is an assortment of materials—books, journals, magazines, records, and other items—that have been arranged and made available for members' and other users' use by specialists. Libraries can be actual structures, rooms, or collections kept outside such structures. They can range in size and be maintained by organisations, corporations, governments, or private citizens. A library is a collection of resources, books, or media that are available for use rather than merely display (Bassey and Umoh, 2023).

Furthermore, Bassey and Umoh (2021) mentioned that libraries, especially school libraries, are essential for providing books and non-book materials for teachers and students for learning. A library is an establishment that provides its members and those of affiliated institutions with access to a collection of books as well as other materials and media. Libraries can be actual places, virtual spaces, or both that offer digital (soft copies) or physical (hard copies) materials. In order to provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and to offer targeted services and programmes with the aim of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences as well as stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole, libraries are collections of resources in a variety of formats that are organised by information professionals or other experts.

Bassey and Bantai (2021) mentioned that a library is a noise-free reading area that enables concentration on tasks. A library is a location where users can access information resources and receive information services from experts in locating, gathering, arranging, and processing information sources

as well as analysing information needs. It may alternatively be viewed as a location that is both real and virtual, with the virtual component highlighting remote computer terminal access to digital information resources and services.

CONCEPT OF MEDICAL LIBRARY AND HEALTH LIBRARIES

Medical and health libraries are specialised establishments committed to meeting the information need of the general public, researchers, students, and healthcare professionals. Because they give users access to a wealth of materials, such as medical texts, journals, databases, and evidence-based guidelines, these libraries are essential to the functioning of the healthcare system. They aid in the communication of recent findings and clinical expertise, improving the standard of healthcare provision and encouraging well-informed decision-making. By serving as central hubs of medical information, these libraries help bridge the gap between research and practice, ensuring that the latest scientific advancements are accessible to those who need them (National Library of Medicine, 2023).

Information retrieval, instruction, research assistance, and patient education are among the main duties performed by medical and health libraries. They offer vital tools that assist clinical decision-making and evidence-based practice, including electronic databases, textbooks, and peer-reviewed periodicals. These libraries also provide information literacy instruction and training, which aids users in finding and using medical information efficiently. Medical libraries are established to help people find health and scientific information to improve healthcare. They can be found in hospitals, medical schools, private industry, and health associations. Medical libraries serve a variety of communities, including: healthcare professionals, researchers, students, patients, consumers, and information specialists. Medical libraries provide access to a range of resources, including: MEDLINE, Electronic resources, Print and digital journal collections, and Print reference books. Medical libraries also help health professionals by providing access to information literacy training.

A health or medical library is designed to assist physicians, health professionals, students, patients, consumers, medical researchers, and information specialists in finding health and scientific information to improve, update, assess, or evaluate health care. Ikoko (2022) mentioned that medical/health libraries are established to provide access to medical-related information. They acquire, organize, and disseminate needed medical and health information by providing information resources and efficient library services. The aim of these libraries is to ensure that doctors and health workers have access to adequate information resources and services.

CONCEPT OF HEALTH LIBRARIANS

Health librarians locate, evaluate, make vital information accessible, and display it in a way that enhances patient care and promotes health and medical education, research, and publication. They are sometimes referred to as medical information specialists, health information professionals, or a variety of other names. A vital component of the healthcare team is the medical librarian. They enable doctors, allied health workers, and researchers stay up to date on new discoveries in their fields of expertise, which directly affects the quality of patient treatment. Additionally, they collaborate closely with customers and patients who are looking for reliable health information. Ikolo (2022) saw health librarians as health information professionals and medical information specialists who acquire, process, and enable users' access to needed information that can advance patient care, provide support for medical education, and conduct medical research. These librarians are skilled in providing health-related information resources that can enhance the quality of information goods and services offered by medical libraries.

Academic medical libraries, hospitals, corporate libraries (such those in pharmaceutical and device manufacturing businesses), and insurance companies are just a few of the numerous places

where medical or health librarians work. The general public, medical students, physicians, nurses, and others working in the health sector are among their clientele. It is not necessary to have a medical degree to work in the health information area, however some health sciences librarians do have one, and some positions—especially reference positions—may include it as a desired but non-required qualification. Medical librarians work anywhere there is a need for health information. Colleges, universities, professional schools; hospitals, clinics, and academic health centres; consumer health libraries; research facilities; foundations; biotechnology centres; insurance companies; producers of medical equipment; manufacturers of pharmaceuticals; publishers; and federal, state, and local government agencies are some examples of workplace settings. Nevertheless, some medical librarians work in non-traditional library environments, such Internet businesses, where they curate, index, and arrange online content. Others oversee the libraries of sizable hospitals or academic health centres as directors. They frequently act as chief information officers for companies in the healthcare industry. Medical librarians typically work in academic institutions in positions with significant authority and prominence, such as associate university librarians, associate deans, or deans.

However, medical librarians offer access to materials in a number of formats, including electronic data and sources as well as conventional print materials. They create and oversee digital libraries, blogs on the Internet, online education, and websites. They run outreach initiatives for consumers, off-campus students, public health departments, and independent healthcare practitioners. Medical librarians collaborate closely with a range of library staff members to complete daily activities. Additionally, they work together on a range of institutional responsibilities with peers, including marketing, business, information technology systems, and fundraising.

Medical librarians have prioritised serving the information needs of healthcare professionals over those of patients or consumers since the turn of the 20th century. Medical information experts' primary area of expertise and practice is medicine, not information. Moreover, as evidenced by the growth of electronic health records, current developments in medical informatics have gone beyond knowledge-based information (the literature) to patient data. The only goal in both of these domains is to promote ethical therapeutic practices. But external influences have impacted both systems, putting them in direct opposition to one another. Medical librarians now deal with electronic literature and extend the reach to patients and consumers, in addition to health professionals (Vasanthakumar, 2013).

According to Klem et al. (2019), health librarians support patients' health literacy and health information needs in clinical settings. However, they usually contribute to the promotion of health literacy in outpatient and inpatient healthcare settings by supporting information prescription programs. Teaching information skills is also one of the most important duties of a clinical librarian or clinical information assistant in the medical field. As "custodians of information," librarians see it as their responsibility to educate the public about information anxiety and how to deal with it by giving them the resources they need (Shahnaz & Nasab, 2023).

CONCEPT OF HUMAN HEALTH

Health is defined as the degree to which a person is able to manage their surroundings in all of these different ways. A living thing's state of metabolic or functional efficiency is referred to as its health. It is the capacity of people or groups to adjust and control oneself in the face of social, psychological, or physical difficulties in humans. As essential a resource as water, food, or energy, "human health" is defined as the entire state of physical, social, and mental well-being and not just the absence of illness, disease, or infirmity. According to Infante (2024) human health has evolved to encompass a broad range of physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions.

World Health Organization (2017) has expanded this definition to include a more holistic perspective, emphasizing complete physical, mental, and social well-being rather than just the absence of illness. This more comprehensive viewpoint emphasises the significance of leading a balanced and

healthful lifestyle that includes appropriate eating, consistent exercise, enough sleep, and stress management. The ability of the body's systems to operate normally is referred to as physical health, which is arguably the most palpable component of human health. It entails eating a balanced diet and staying at a healthy weight. Health is defined as the degree to which a person is able to manage their surroundings in all of these different ways. A living thing's state of metabolic or functional efficiency is referred to as its health. It is the capacity of people or groups to adjust and control oneself in the face of social, psychological, or physical difficulties in humans. As essential a resource as water, food, or energy is the concept of "human health," which is defined as the entire state of physical, social, and mental well-being and not just the absence of illness, disease, or infirmity. According to Infante (2024), human health has evolved to encompass a broad range of physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions.

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Another essential element of total wellbeing is mental health, which is influenced by social, psychological, and emotional aspects. It influences people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and has a major impact on how they manage stress, interact with others, and make decisions. Anxiety and depression are two mental health conditions that are becoming more widely acknowledged as serious public health concerns. Wang (2020) highlights the growing prevalence of mental health disorders and the importance of early intervention and accessible mental health services to improve outcomes. Not to be underestimated in health concerns, social well-being is as important. It speaks to a person's capacity to build fulfilling interpersonal bonds and adjust to different social contexts. Health outcomes are greatly influenced by social determinants of health, including social support, education, and income. Marmot and Bell (2019) argue that social inequalities lead to disparities in health, emphasising that social well-being should be addressed alongside physical and mental health to achieve holistic health improvement.

Human health is more than just the absence of sickness; it is dynamic and multifaceted. It includes social, mental, and physical well-being, all of which are related to one another and enhance general health. It can be assessed by looking at things like life expectancy, age-specific mortality rates, disease incidence and prevalence, regular exercise, and abstaining from dangerous habits like smoking and binge drinking. Lee (2018) mentioned that physical health is strongly linked to longevity and the quality of life, as regular physical activity and a nutritious diet can prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

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Human health is more than just the absence of sickness; it is a dynamic and complicated state. It includes social, mental, and physical well-being, all of which are related to one another and enhance general health. Life expectancy, age-specific mortality rates, and disease incidence and prevalence can all be used to quantify it.

ROLES OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL LIBRARIANS IN THE PROVISION OF ADEQUATE MEDICAL LIBRARY IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, health and medical librarians play a vital role in the establishment and upkeep of sufficient medical libraries, which are essential for assisting researchers, students, and healthcare practitioners. Their responsibilities cover a number of crucial areas, ensuring that medical libraries meet the demands of their patrons and operate efficiently.

- **Collection Development and Management:**

Health and medical librarians are responsible for the acquisition, organisation, and management of medical literature and resources. By selecting relevant, up-to-date materials, they ensure that the library's collection meets the diverse needs of its users, including clinicians, researchers, and students (Afolabi & Akerele, 2021).

- **Information literacy training:**

librarians provide essential training programs that teach healthcare professionals and students how to effectively find, evaluate, and use medical information. These programs are vital for enabling users to navigate complex medical databases and resources efficiently.

- **Provision of health information sources:**

To play a significant role in the full realisation of the sustainability development goals as it affects health, medical librarians can provide health information sources to those residing in rural areas (Ekere, Eze, Oyemike & Ebobo, 2017). However, providing health information is a fundamental role of health and medical librarians in ensuring the adequacy of medical libraries in Nigeria. This involves; Acquisition, i.e., librarians select and procure a diverse range of health-related materials, including textbooks, journals, databases, and electronic resources, that meet the needs of healthcare professionals and students.

- **Organisation:**

systematically catalogue and organise these resources, making them easily accessible through well-structured library stems and Updates, which involve librarians continuously updating the collection to include the latest research and guidelines, ensure users have access to current and evidence-based information.

- **Research Support and Services:**

Medical librarians offer specialised research services, including literature searches, systematic reviews, and reference management. This support is crucial for medical research, as it ensures that researchers have access to the most relevant and reliable information for their work.

- **Promotion of Digital Resources:**

In the digital age, librarians play a key role in promoting the use of electronic resources, such as online databases, e-journals, and digital libraries. By facilitating access to these resources, they help overcome geographical barriers and ensure that users across Nigeria can access critical medical information (Oladele & Oyelude, 2022).

- **Support for Continuing Medical Education (CME):**

Librarians contribute to the continuing education of healthcare professionals by providing access to resources that are essential for ongoing learning and professional development. This support helps medical practitioners stay updated with the latest advancements in their fields.

- **Collaboration with Healthcare Institutions:**

Health and medical librarians work closely with healthcare institutions to tailor library services to the specific needs of the medical community. This collaboration ensures that the resources provided are aligned with the practical requirements of clinicians and researchers, thereby enhancing the library's effectiveness (Omotayo & Akerele, 2020).

ROLES OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL LIBRARIANS IN EFFECTING UTILISATION OF MEDICAL LIBRARY RESOURCES IN NIGERIA

Health and medical librarians in Nigeria play a vital role in optimising the use of medical library resources. Their contributions are essential in ensuring that healthcare professionals, researchers, and students have access to and effectively utilise the information they need for better healthcare outcomes. Here are the key roles:

- **Facilitating Access to Current Information:**

Health and medical librarians ensure that the library's resources, including journals, databases, and textbooks, are up-to-date and relevant. By continuously updating the library's collection and making current information readily available, they support evidence-based practice and informed decision-making in the medical field (Afolabi & Akerele, 2021).

- **Providing Specialised Research Assistance:**

Librarians offer specialised research services, such as literature searches and systematic reviews, tailored to the specific needs of healthcare professionals and researchers. This support enhances the utilisation of medical library resources by ensuring that users can efficiently access the most relevant information for their work (Omotayo & Akerele, 2020).

- **Promoting Information Literacy:**

Librarians conduct training sessions and workshops to improve information literacy among users. These programs teach healthcare professionals and students how to effectively search for, evaluate, and use medical information, thus increasing their ability to utilise library resources efficiently (Oladele & Oyelude, 2022).

- **Enhancing Digital Resource Accessibility:**

In an increasingly digital world, health and medical librarians are pivotal in promoting the use of electronic resources. They provide access to digital libraries, e-journals, and online databases, ensuring that even users in remote areas can utilise essential medical information (Omotayo & Akerele, 2020).

- **Supporting Continuing Medical Education:**

Librarians play a crucial role in supporting continuing medical education (CME) by providing access to resources that are essential for lifelong learning. Through curated collections and tailored information services, they ensure that medical professionals can continuously update their knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing the overall utilisation of library resources (Afolabi & Akerele, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Medical and health librarians play a crucial role in Nigeria's healthcare system by ensuring access to and effective use of medical resources. Their responsibilities include curating essential information that supports evidence-based practice and improves healthcare quality. Despite their importance, challenges such as limited funding and inadequate infrastructure affect their effectiveness. Evaluating their roles helps identify these challenges and their impact on healthcare delivery. Additionally, the integration of digital resources offers new opportunities and requires adaptation. A thorough assessment of these roles is vital for enhancing medical library services and advancing health outcomes in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Medical and health librarians should be encouraged to integrate and effectively utilise digital technologies and online databases in their services. Developing and implementing digital resource management strategies, such as online access to research databases and electronic health records, will enhance the accessibility and dissemination of critical medical information.
- Addressing the financial constraints faced by medical and health libraries is essential for their optimal functioning. Government bodies, health organisations, and educational institutions should allocate more resources to support the acquisition of up-to-date medical literature, technology upgrades, and infrastructure improvements.
- To improve the effectiveness of medical and health librarians, it is crucial to invest in continuous professional development and specialised training programmes. These should focus on emerging trends in medical information management, digital tools, and evidence-based practices.

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