

Professionalism and Health Records Management Practice in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This review on professionalism and health records management practice in Nigeria aims at examining how professionalism relates to health records management practice in Nigeria. This is achieved through objective identification of basic principles of professionalism and their influence on health records management practice in Nigeria. It discusses the characteristics of a profession; health records management practice as a profession and the status of health records management practice in Nigeria. Also, health records managers' code of ethics, professional association of health records management practitioners and the usefulness of health records management practice to the society are established. A qualitative analysis and theoretical discussion have been carried out to match evidence from existing records with evidence in the literature. It is observed that correlation exists between professionalism and health records management practice. Hence, it recommends among others the need for government at all levels to recognize the status of health records management and motivate them for increased work productivity.

Keywords: *Professionalism, Health Records Management Practice and Profession*

INTRODUCTION

Everybody strives to belong to a profession. Many claim to be professionals. Associations of tradesmen and trade unions often arrogate to themselves the tag 'professional bodies'. Everywhere, there are talks of 'professional thieves', 'professional students' (those students who are found on campus, year in, year out without anybody being certain of what department they belong to or when they are due to graduate). 'Professional drivers; 'professional tailors; professional teachers, accountants, bankers, architects, doctors,

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musicians, lawyers, town planners, estate surveyors and valuers, engineers, pharmacists, footballers, boxers, and so on as professionals (Nwalo, 2010). Professionalism is the conduct, aims or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person. It is the following of a profession for gain in order to achieve means of livelihood (Merriam Webster online dictionary, 2015). Health Records Management Practice involves providing accurate documentation and registration of patient health information and up-to-date health statistical information on hospital activities, both on curative and preventive services, in-patient and outpatient services, through the process of gathering and collection of patient information and manipulation for meaningful decision making (AHIMA, 2012). The way health records practitioners display high level of professionalism expected of them when working with patients and clients influences the integrity of their profession.

Despite the fact that health records management practice fulfilled almost all the basic attributes of a profession, there is still room for improvement in the following specific areas of the practice:

- i. Non publication from time to time the list of registered health records practitioners as stipulated in part 1 section 2(b) of Act 39 of 1989.
- ii. Lack of full professionalization of some health institutions' department of health records, which is not in the best interest of the practice.
- iii. Irregular conduct of professional continuing education programmes, for knowledge advancement among professionals
- iv. Stagnated career progression, due to poor implementation of the enabling scheme of service for Health Records Officers
- v. Non recognition of health records professionals for top managerial positions in the health industry
- vi. Limited number of degree awarding institutions in health information management in Nigeria
- vii. Lack of special remuneration package for health records practitioners like their counter-parts in other professions.

Thus, the general objective of this study is to examine the relationship between professionalism and health records management practice in Nigeria. However, the specific objectives are:

1. To outline the characteristics of health records management profession in Nigeria
2. To distinguish between a professional association and the regulatory agency in Nigeria
3. To explain why health records management practice is a profession in Nigeria
4. To identify the existing gaps in health records management practice in Nigeria

In line with the objectives stated above, the following questions were raised:

1. What are the characteristics of a profession in Nigeria?
2. What distinguishes a professional association from the regulatory agency in Nigeria?
3. Is health records management practice a profession in Nigeria?

This study is a desk top study, which made used of literature review and theoretical analysis. Inferences were drawn from existing records and literature to establish relationship between professionalism and health records management practice in Nigeria.

Characteristics of a Profession

A profession is a vocation founded upon specialized educational training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested objective counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of other business gain (Malan, 2011). A professional is a member of a profession or any person who earns a living from a specified activity (Wikipedia, Nd). The term also describes the standard of education and training that prepare members of the profession with the particular knowledge and skills necessary to perform the role of that profession (Wikipedia, Nd). The Oxford English Dictionary (2001) defines profession as “public declaration; business or a profession which one publicly avows”. It could be described as a type of job that needs special training or skill. The characteristics of a profession as identified by Nwalo (2010) are:

- i. A profession is learned, since it is based on a substantial body of knowledge (science) or art (skill) held as a common possession and extended by united effort (research)
- ii. A profession is guided by altruism or a concern for the client who comes for help. It has a standard of conduct based on courtesy, honor, and ethics which guides the practitioner in his relations with clients, colleagues and the public.
- iii. A profession has techniques or skills which can be taught. The skills are taught through a relatively long educational process based on the body of knowledge and art, in which the professional group has recognized responsibility.
- iv. A profession is practical, since this body of knowledge can be used to solve human problems.
- v. It has a standard of professional qualification for admission to the professional group, based on character, training and proven competence.
- vi. A profession is based by recognition of status by one’s colleagues, or by the state as a basis of good standing.
- vii. A profession has an organization of the professional group devoted to its common advancement and its social duty rather than the maintenance of economic monopoly.
- viii. The practitioners of a profession enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy and

- should have the ability to exercise independent judgment in problem-solving.
- ix. A profession has an official publication for advancement of knowledge of the profession.
 - x. A profession must be useful to the society and its practice should be able to provide adequate means of livelihood for the practitioner.

Health records management practice meets most of the conditions associated with other professions and it is also poised to block the existing loopholes in the practice.

Who are Health Records Managers?

Health Records managers are responsible for maintaining components of health information system, consistent with the medical, legal, accreditation and regulatory requirements of the healthcare delivery system. Health Records Managers maintain, collect, and analyze data, crucial to the delivery of quality patient care. They compile and report health (information) data for reimbursement, facility planning, marketing, and research. Also, they abstract and code clinical data, using appropriate classification scheme, and analyze health records, according to standards (Omole, 2013). Health Records managers are health care professionals, responsible for collecting, capturing, storing, analyzing distributing and protecting medical information, fundamental to providing quality patient care. The information supplied by them, are used by physicians and other health care professionals to provide optimum patient care, and support important medical decisions (WHO 2011). Specifically, the functions of health records managers, according to Hicks (2017), are:

- i. Creation, care, custody, storage and retrieval of patients' health (records) information.
- ii. Documentation and registration of patients' physical and demographic information
- iii. Provision of statistical information from the health records, for medical, administrative, research, monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- iv. Rendering of associated services concerned with the release of patients' health information, such as legal services, insurance services and international health agencies e.g. WHO.
- v. Coding and indexing of diseases and operations for compilation of morbidity and mortality health information at local, state and national levels for the purpose of identifying specific areas of intervention.
- vi. Establishment of effective numbering control in order to facilitate accessibility of health information for research towards the development of good public health strategies.
- vii. Maintenance of confidentiality of health information to protect personally identifiable information from unauthorized persons.

- viii. Ensuring continuity of patient care through the establishment of an effective appointment system.
- ix. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of health information and development of appropriate indicators for the evaluation of services rendered.
- x. Participation in various training programmes towards the development of health records and information management practices, which are aimed at contributing to advancement of knowledge in the practice.

Health Records Management Practice as a Profession

Professional associations should not be categorized with trade unions. Whereas trade unions fight for the improvement of the conditions of service of employees, professional bodies pursue the development of techniques and styles of operation. The profession provides a service which is very important to the society (Nwalo, 2010). Because of the extent and nature of the profession's specialized knowledge, society grants its members a monopoly in improving the professional service and the authority to control admission to their ranks and to evaluate as well as regulate their own performance. Considering all these attributes of a profession, there is no doubt that Health Records Management Practice is a profession. Health Records Management Practice, by all standards, is a profession as it is practised in Nigeria. Examples of how the professional attributes apply to Health Records Management Practice are:

- i. ***Health Records Management Practice is learned:*** This is to say that it is based on a substantial body of knowledge (theories and principles), for example, health records management systems, coding and indexing principles, management theory, principles of health and hospital statistics, and so on (Huffman, 2011).
- ii. ***Health Records Management Practice has techniques and skills which can be taught:*** The teaching is done through a process of formal education in Universities, and Monotechnics for considerably long periods (Huffman, 2011). The basic qualification in health records management practice is Bachelor's degree (B.Sc.) or HND, which takes a minimum of four years to obtain for candidates admitted through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). Masters Degree in Health Information Management in Nigeria takes a minimum of 18 calendar months. The PhD. Degree programme takes minimum of 36 calendar months.
- iii. ***Health Records Management Practice as a profession is guided by altruism:*** In health records management service, the health records officer considers the interest of the patients and clients first, before any other thing. Health Records

Officers always place service before material gain and strive at all times to provide services consistent with the need for quality health care and treatment to all who are ill and not injure, as contained in their Code of Ethics (Huffman, 2011).

- iv. ***Health Records Management Practice, as a profession is intellectual and carries with it a great personal responsibility for the exercise of choice and judgment:*** Health records management services like coding and indexing, compilation of hospital and vital statistics, answering researchers queries, confidentiality of health records and selective dissemination of health information are all intellectual activities. Health records management in all its ramifications also involves intellectuality for success, because within the framework of general principles of the practice, the health records officer is constantly confronted with situations where he needs to exercise discretion or choice.
- v. ***Health Records Management Practice is applied:*** The impact of health records management services is felt by the society, especially the patients, clients and researchers to whom the services have been rendered. This is why health records management students are attached to standard hospitals for a reasonable length of time during their programme in schools of health information management.
- vi. ***Health Records Management Practice has a standard of professional qualifications for admission to the profession:*** In Nigeria, the minimum professional qualification is B.Sc. or HND in health information management. The schools of health information set minimum entry requirements which all aspiring candidates must have. Admission to the profession is also based on proven competence through annual registration and licensing examinations organized by Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN) for graduates from schools of health information management, seeking to become members of the profession.
- vii. ***Recognition of the status of Health Records Management Practice by the government:*** The Health Information Managers Association of Nigeria (HIMAN) formerly known as Nigerian Health Records Association (NHRA) has succeeded in getting the Nigerian government to make a law backing up the health records management practice as a profession. This law came into effect in 1989, which established Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria via Act 39 of 1989. The Health Records Officers Registration Board is a statutory agency of the federal government established by Act No.39 of 1989, for the regulation and

control of practice of the profession of Health Records Management in Nigeria (Akanji, 2015).

- viii. ***Health Records Management Practice has professional association at national level:*** The Health Information Managers' Association of Nigeria (H.I.M.A.N) and Association of Health Records Practitioners of Nigeria (A.H.R.P.N) have branches in all the States of the Federation, all of which promote the practice of the profession through meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences.
- ix. ***Health Information Managers Association of Nigeria has a professional publication - The HIMAN journal:*** This is a journal devoted to the promotion of excellent professional practice through research and publication. The journal also takes care of informing members of forthcoming meetings and other activities that are of interest to all members of the profession. At the world level, we have the International Federation of Health Information Managers Association (IFHMA) – formerly known as IFHRO (International Federation of Health Records Officers), which publishes the IFHMA Journal circulated all over the world to promote professionalism in health records management practice.
- x. ***Health Records Management Practice as a profession is useful to the society:*** Reports of AHIMA (2010) concludes that health information is essential for socio-economic development. Health information is necessary for development and advancement in medical knowledge, health care service delivery, education and training, planning, monitoring, evaluation and government decision-making activities. Health records department in the health institutions collects health information, manages health information and facilitates selective dissemination of health information to legitimate users in the society for developmental purposes.

Regulatory Agencies of Health Records Management Practice in Nigeria

Afuye (2010) reports that the Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria was established as a statutory body by Act No. 39 of 1989; titled "Health Record officers (registration) as published under government notice No. 693, via Federal Republic of Nigeria (Extraordinary) Official Gazette No. 71 Vol. 76 published in Lagos on 11th December, 1989. The Act establishes a Board for the control and practice of the profession of Health Records Management. Part 1 section 1 & 2 of the Act states that:

- (1) “There is hereby established for Health Records Officers a body to be known as the Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria”.
- (2) “The functions of the Board shall include the following, that is:
 - a. Determining what standards of knowledge and skill which shall be attained by a person seeking to become a member of the profession and improving those standards from time to time as circumstances may permit;
 - b. Securing in accordance with the provisions of this Act; the establishment and maintenance of a register of persons registered under this Act, as members of the profession and the publication from time to time of lists of those persons;
 - c. Conducting examinations in health records management and awarding certificates or diplomas to successful candidates as appropriate and for such purpose, the Board shall prescribe fees to be paid in respect thereof and;
 - d. Performing such other functions conferred on the Board by this Act”.

The Board comprises of a chairman and eleven other members, seven of whom are Health Records Professionals. All appointments were made by the president, Commander In Chief of the Armed Forces, on the recommendation of the Honorable Minister of Health. To enable it carry out its functions effectively, the Board is empowered in Part III; paragraph 17 of the Act to approve:

- a) Any course of Training which is intended for persons seeking to become members of the profession under this Act and which the Board considers is designed to confer on persons completing the training sufficient knowledge and skill for the practice of the profession:
- b) Any qualification which as a result of examinations taken in conjunction with the course of training approved by the Board under this section, is granted to candidates reaching a standard at the examination indicating that they gave sufficient knowledge and skill to practice the profession to which the qualification relates.

The Board approved the following nomenclatures for the practice of Health Records Management in Nigeria; Health Records Management Profession, Health Records Management Practice, Department of Health Records Management, Health Records Officers and Health Records Technicians (Akanji, 2015). Health Information Managers’ Association of Nigeria and Association of Health Records Practitioners of Nigeria are Professional Associations, in which members agreed to come together and work for the progress of the profession under the umbrella of the Associations (Ajayi, 2015). These Associations were established through friendly interaction by Health Records Practitioners. They made their own rules and regulations (constitution) which guide them in all their

deliberations. The actions and progressive activities of the Health Information Managers' Association of Nigeria (HIMAN) and the Association of Health Records Practitioners of Nigeria (AHRPN) gained *de facto* recognition by all governments of the federation and have thus been able to influence Government decisions and actions on all matters relating to the profession and the professionals. These associations are registered as corporate bodies with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). All well-meaning Health Records Professionals belong to these Associations in Nigeria. And the core values of the profession are; Discipline, Teamwork, Trust, Accountability and Professionalism.

The enacted Act on Health records officers (Registration and so on) Board of Nigeria is to ensure that admittance into the profession is regulated, standards for health records and information management education enforced and that all bad eggs in the system going by the name "Health Records Officers" are flushed out. The formation of professional association and establishment of regulatory agency protect the rights and privileges of the members in the country.

Health Record Managers' Code of Ethics

Huffman (2011) submits that Health Records Management Profession has common code of ethics that guide health records practitioners in the course of carrying out their duties. These are the code of ethics or public declarations which health records practitioners publicly avow on the day of their induction into the profession.

1. Conduct yourself in the practice of this profession, so as to bring honor and dignity to you, and the health records management profession.
2. Place service before material gain and strive at all times to provide services consistent with the need for quality health care and treatment to all patients and clients.
3. Preserve and secure the health records, the information contained therein, and the appropriate secondary records and existing policies and legal provisions.
4. Hold up the doctrine of confidentiality and the individual's right to privacy in the disclosure of personally identifiable medical and social information.
5. Recognize the source of the authority and powers delegated to you and conscientiously discharge the duties and responsibilities thus entrusted.
6. Accept compensation only in accordance with service actually performed or negotiated with the health institution
7. Cooperate with other health professions and organizations to promote the quality of health programmes and advancement of medical care, ensuring respect and consideration for the responsibility and the dignity of medical and other health professions.

8. Strive to increase the profession's body of systematic knowledge and individual competency through continued self-improvement and application of current advancement in the conduct of health records management practices.
9. Participating in developing and strengthening professional manpower and appropriately represent the profession in the public.
10. Represent truthfully and accurately, professional credentials, education and experience in any official transaction or notice, including other positions and duality of interest, and;
11. Refuse to participate in or conceal unethical practices or procedures in your relationship with other individuals or organizations.

Usefulness of Health Records Management Practice to the Society

Osundina (2012) opines that a written record must be maintained on every person who has been admitted to the hospital as an in-patient, an out-patient, or as an emergency patient because health record documents the hospital experience of the patient with the main objective of providing a means of communication between the physician and other professionals contributing to the patients care. It serves as a basis for planning individual patient's care and furnishes documentary evidence of the course of the patient's illness and treatment during each hospital admission. Health records serve as a basis for analysis study and evaluation of the quality of care rendered to the patient, assist in protecting the legal interest of the patient, hospital, physician and health workers. It also provides clinical data that are used in research and education for the purpose of extending frontiers of medical knowledge for an improved quality patient care.

The physiological and sociological data contained in health record such as; Name, Address, Sex, Age, Marital Status, Occupation, Place of Origin, Denomination, Next of Kin and Address of Next of Kin, hospital Number, phone number among others help to distinguish the health records of one patient from another to avoid confusion. Health records are useful for the teaching, or giving instructions to medical Students, Nurses, and other professionals. It is useful in seeking out etiological factors in a disease, compare progress and result of different forms of treatment for patient with similar disease (Fatiregun, 2014). Quality of patient care is assured, as the health records provide continuity of patients' care on subsequent admission, evaluation of medical care rendered to the patients, and provision of clinical and health statistical data for the planning of health care delivery services and development of health policies, which have positive impact on the health status of the society.

Emerging ethical and legal issues are resolved, as health records serve as witness

in court for hospital, its staff, and the patient. Also, insurance claims for damages resulting from accident are made possible through evidence provided by health records (Osundina, 2014). Therefore health records management professionals carefully generate and collect health information, take custody of health information, manage health information and selectively disseminate them to the legitimate members of the society for quality health care service that guarantee socio-economic development of the nation. It is the health records managers as professionals that are behind provision of accessible, affordable, and cost effective health care services to the society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of this study, inferences were drawn from existing records, and related literature, that correlation exists between professionalism and health records management practice, as evident in the work of Akanji (2015), which reports that “only those Health Records Professionals registered with the Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria have legal right to practice in Nigeria”. This result agrees with part iv of the Act which empowers the Board to “establish a body to be known as the Health records Officers Disciplinary committee which shall be charged with the duty of considering and determining any case referred to it”. In the same vein, the submission of Danjuma (2015) in the recent Circular letter No. C.3689/T1/10, dated 14th September, 2015 from the department of human resources management of the Federal Ministry of Health, which admonished various establishments to ensure that:

- (i) Only qualified and licensed health records officers are assigned to manage health records in the hospitals,
- (ii) Only persons with requisite qualification(s) and duly licensed are appointed to practice as health records officers or technicians; and
- (iii) Only persons with practicing license are presented for promotions and interviews in the civil service of the Federation or of a State or any public or private establishment, body or institution in Nigeria.

These attested to the influence of professionalism on health records management practice in Nigeria. When Health records managers practise their profession, they are rewarded with salaries and allowances. This is because the importance of health records management professionals cannot be underestimated for the vital role they play in the society through creation, processing, analysis, storage, and dissemination of health information to the right person at the appropriate time and at the minimum cost, to promote health status of the society (AHIMA, 2012).

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government at all levels are advised to give maximum support and encouragement to Health Records Management Professionals so as to ensure availability of accurate health data and information as a public good for Public, Private and Non-governmental Organizations' utilization.
2. It is imperative for government and health institutions management at all levels in Nigeria to give full recognition to this profession by promoting their welfare packages and allow them to get to the zenith of their career in the health sector.
3. Government should ensure that Health Records Officers are placed on a special remuneration bracket like their counter-parts in other professions (such as Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists, Medical Laboratory Scientist, Physiotherapist and lawyers).

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