Roles of Health Information Management Professionals in Achieving Universal Health Coverage and Career Prospects of Health Information Management Professionals in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The roles of health information management professionals in achieving universal health coverage and their career prospects in Nigeria were reported. It covered literature reviews, theoretical discussions, and qualitative analyses. The qualitative analysis indicated a relationship between the roles of health information management professionals and the achievement of universal health coverage, and the career prospects of health information management professionals in Nigeria. Findings revealed that health information management professionals contribute to the health system and to people's health by providing the information and data central to medical decision-making and patient care planning. Health information management professionals are in high demand due to statutory regulation, which stipulates that all healthcare facilities must have an electronic health records system. This study recommends that governments at all levels should be committed to universal health coverage to improve the well-being of all citizens by encouraging digitalization and professionalization of health information management departments for the healthcare delivery system.

Keywords: Health information management professionals, universal health coverage, career prospect, health information system, health information services.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The health sector in Nigeria is a fast-growing sub-sector of the social services. Health and Medical personnel need accurate, reliable, complete, and timely information for planning and decision-making. In addition, quality service in health and medical institutions is premised on effective provision of information services by the health information management professionals to all the stakeholders in the health industry (NUC, 2022). Access to health information provides knowledge of available services, expands the capacity for easy healthcare services' delivery, and uses preventive measures to help people know when external assistance is required and builds the confidence that people need to effectively seek out and use available healthcare services (Hull, 2012).

The Federal Ministry of Health (2012) agreed that there is a need for the collection of data since health information should be disseminated to all individuals and communities to enable them to have greater responsibility for their health and wellbeing. Okwilagwe (2013) asserted that information is the knowledge accumulated by people in different forms and from various sources, which can be used in making rational decisions by individuals, groups of individuals, civil organisations, health institutions, and the government. He stressed further that Federal, State, and Local Governments, individuals, groups of people, and business organisations need information for uncertainty reduction, for decision–making and problem-solving situations. Therefore, both the government and the governed need various important information.

Aiyepeku (2012) opined that information reduces the user's level of uncertainty in a particular decision–making. It is concerned with ideas; the use of it is a complex process, which includes taking in and giving out. Therefore, ideas can be in the form of laid-down facts, opinions, reasoning, or emotions, which will have to be organised into a meaningful form and finally expressed in a language that is understandable to those for whom it is intended.

It is against this backdrop that this paper explores the roles of health information management professionals in achieving universal health coverage and the likelihood of someone becoming successful through Health information Management Practices.

2.0. Review of Literature

2.1. Universal Health Coverage

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the full range of quality healthcare services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care (WHO, 2025).

2.2. Career Prospect

Lucinda-Coventry (2005) defined career as the way someone makes their living over a significant period of their life; it is the progress and development of a person or thing, particularly in a specific field. He stated further that prospect is the likelihood of something occurring or the chances of success in exploring or in searching for something.

2.3. Health Information Management

Osundina (2014) submitted that health information involves all the tools, techniques and devices used for recording clear concise and accurate history of a patient's life and illness, written from the medical point of view, including the significant characteristics of a patient and events occurring in the course of professional care for the purpose of providing the best medical care to the patient, teaching, research, medical care evaluation studies and legal requirements. He added that for the health information to be complete, it must contain sufficient information written in sequence of events to justify the diagnosis, and warrant the treatment and result. The quality of healthcare services in any society depends on the proper management of health information. Therefore, efficient, effective and result-oriented healthcare service delivery is dependent on a good health information system, health information storage and health information preservation.

Fatiregun (2016) asserted that a health information system is a combination of people, equipment, data collection and processing methods, to coordinate and produce information in support of planning, decision-making, and management of the healthcare system. Ayede (2016) supported the above by reporting that health information management involves a mechanism for the collection, processing, analysis, and transmission of information required for the organisation and operation of healthcare and research services. He went further to say that the primary objectives of a health information system are to provide reliable, relevant, up-to-date, adequate, timely, and reasonably complete information for healthcare managers at all levels of the healthcare service delivery system.

In the same vein, Olumide (2016) confirmed that a health information management system is a collection of database, personnel, procedures, and instrument, which are organised to develop and utilize available facts to become information, which will be used to facilitate decision-making. They are made operational by indicators. An indicator is a measure of performance that enables the assessment of progress and attainment of achievement.

2.4. Primary Objectives of Managing Health Information

The Six (6) primary objectives of managing health information as explained by Omole and Adebayo (2018). They are:

1. **Continuous Care:** Health Information assists in providing the best medical care to the patient via the collection of recorded facts about health and illnesses that are contained therein.

2. **Communication:** Health Information provides a means of communication between the physician and other professionals contributing to patients' care.
3. **Planning and Administration:** Health Information provides documentary evidence of care rendered during each hospital visit or admission, which serves as a means of generating statistical data for health care planning and effective health services administration.
4. **Medical Care Evaluation:** Health Information serves as the basis for an analysis and evaluation of the quality of care to the patient.
5. **Education and Research**: Health Information provides clinical data for use in research and education in various health and medical disciplines.
6. **Medico-Legal Purposes:** Health Information assists in protecting the legal interests of the patient, the hospital, and the physician.
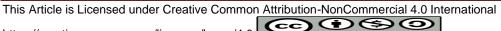
Therefore, health information management professionals carefully generate and collect health information, take custody of health information, manage health information, and selectively disseminate it to the legitimate users in the healthcare setting for the purpose of improving quality healthcare services for an enhanced universal health coverage.

2.5. Determinants of Universal Health Coverage

WHO (2020) reported that the goal of universal health coverage is to ensure that all people obtain the health services they need, without suffering financial hardship when paying for them. For a community or country to achieve universal health coverage, several factors must be in place, including:

1. **A strong, efficient and well-run health system** that meets priority health needs through people-centred integrated healthcare (including services for HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health) by: informing and encouraging people to stay healthy and prevent illness; detecting health conditions early; having the capacity to treat disease; and helping patients with rehabilitation services.
2. **Affordability:** A system for financing health services must be in place, so that people do not suffer financial hardship when using them. This can be achieved in various ways.
3. **Access to essential medicines and technologies** to diagnose and treat medical problems must exist.
4. **A sufficient capacity of well-trained, motivated health workers** to provide the services to meet patients' needs based on the best available evidence must be in place.
5. **It also requires recognition of the critical role played by all sectors** in assuring human health, including transport, education and urban planning.

Therefore, universal health coverage has a direct impact on a population's health, which can only be assessed through the availability of accurate, reliable, complete and timely

information, which is premised on effective provision of information services by the health information management professionals to all the stakeholders in the health industry

2.6.   Who is a Health Information Management Professional?

Hull (2012) submitted that health information management professional is a specialist or professional, saddled with the responsibility of providing accurate documentation and registration of patient health information and up-to-date health statistical information on hospital activities' analysis, both on curative and preventive health services, in-patient and outpatient services, through the process of gathering and collection of patient information and manipulation for meaningful decision making. Health information management practitioners are responsible for maintaining components of the health information system, consistent with the medical, legal, accreditation and regulatory requirements of the health care delivery system. Hence, health information management professionals maintain, collect and analyse data, which are crucial to the delivery of quality patient care.

The health information management professionals compile and report health (information) data for reimbursement, facility planning, marketing, risk management, quality assessment, and research; abstract and code clinical data using an appropriate classification system and analyse health records according to standards. Health information management practitioners play key role in the planning, implementation and management of the Electronic Health Records (E.H.R), Health Information Exchange (HIE), Regional Health Information Organisation (RHIO) and Legal Aspect of Health Records (LAHR). They care for people's health by taking care of their health information and making sure that all medical information collected about an individual is complete, accurate and protected; yet at the same time readily available for healthcare providers when it is needed (Osundina, 2014).

Health information management practitioners are healthcare professionals responsible for collecting, capturing, storing, analysing, distributing and protecting medical information, which is fundamental to the provision of quality patient care. Therefore, information supplied by health information management professionals is used by healthcare professionals to provide optimum patient care and support important medical decisions that facilitate universal health coverage.

2.7.   Specific Duties of a Health Information Management Professional in Achieving Universal Health Coverage

According to Huffman (2012), health information management professionals are the pivot upon which all other healthcare practitioners and all healthcare activities revolve in any healthcare industry. Hence, health information management professionals are responsible for the following duties.
-    Design and management of information system in the health care industry.

- Collect and generate records and reports about patients, who are being treated by Doctors and other clinicians.
- Use their clinical knowledge of disease and surgical procedures, technical knowledge of computer systems and databases and their management skills to set up and monitor healthcare information systems.
- Enhance the legal use of people's medical records and health information by establishing appropriate procedures in handling and protecting personal data.
- Coordinating health care information from paper based and electronic patient records.
- Planning and implementing information management projects and programmes.
- Adhering to federal Government regulations as regard to security of electronic patient records.
- Creation, care, custody, storage and retrieval of patients' health information.
- Documentation and registration of patient's physical and demographic information.
- Provision of statistical information from the health records for medical, administrative, research and policy formulation at all levels.
- Rendering of associated services concerned with the release of patients health information such as; legal services, insurance service etc.
- Coding and indexing of diseases and operation for compilation of morbidity and mortality health information at all levels for the purpose of identifying specific area of intervention
- Establishment of effective numbering control to facilitate accessibility to health information for research study towards development of quality healthcare services.
- Maintenance of confidentiality of health information, to protect information from unauthorized person. (via appropriate numbering, filing, tracing, appointment, coding and indexing systems)
- Ensuring continuity of patient care through the establishment and development of appropriate indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of the health status of the population.
- Participation in various training programmes towards development of health information management systems and practices for an improved universal health coverage.
- Formulate policies on the health information system and preparation of budget for its running (Omole,2017)

Therefore, the main goal of a health information management professional is to provide health information services to legitimate users in a timely version to support the process of decision making and problem solving for improved healthcare delivery system.

2.8. Educational/Professional Qualifications of Health Information Management Professional

There are different cadres in health information management practices (Popoola, 2010). To become a health information management professional, you need to complete an accredited undergraduate or postgraduate Degree, Diplomas and pass Licensing Examinations as stipulated by the approved scheme of service for each cadre and complete proper registration formalities with Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria; to qualify for practice in Nigeria. Omole, Ogunniran and Adebayo (2018) analyzed basic requirements for each of these cadres as explained below:

2.8.1. Health Information Management Officer Cadre (HIMO)

To become a Health Information Officer (HIMO), you will need to complete a Bachelor's Degree (B.Sc./B.HIM) or Master's Degree (M.Sc./M.HIM) in Health Information Management from a recognised university and pass both Part 1 and Part 11 Licensing Examinations of the Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN).

2.8.2. Health Information Management Technologist Cadre (HIMTG)

To become a Health Information Technologist, you will need to complete a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Health Information Management from an accredited College of Health Technology/School of Information Management and pass both Part 1 and Part 11 Licensing Examinations of the Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN).

2.8.3. Health Information Management Technician Cadre (HIMT)

To become a health information management technician, you will need to complete a Professional Diploma (PD) or National Diploma (ND) in Health Information Management from an accredited College of Health Technology or School of Health Information Management, as the case may be, and pass Part 1 Licensing Examination of Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN)

Graduates from each of these programmes are expected to complete all Professional Registration formalities with the Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN) and obtain a current Practice License to enhance their qualification to practice in Nigeria.

2.9. Prospects of Health Information Management Practices

Prospects of health information management practices could be better discussed in the following ways to achieve the desired goals of this study.

2.9.1. Job Satisfaction Prospects

Health information management practitioners report the following aspects of the health information management job as most satisfying: contact with a wide range of people and professions; challenges brought up by development in healthcare and information technology, opportunities to specialise in computing, financial, and health services management, etc., planning and implementation of healthcare projects and programs.

2.9.2. Work Places' Prospects or Career Opportunities

Career opportunities are available at the following work places for health information management practitioners:

- Hospitals and Clinics (public and private);
- Computer and Information Technology Companies;
- Local, States and Federal Ministries, Agencies and Departments;
- Health insurance companies (Insurance Companies);
- Primary Healthcare and Community Health Services;
- Research Institutions; Health Maintenance Organisation (HMOs);
- Law Firms and Consultancy Firms.
- Software Companies, Organized private sector (e.g. Commercial Banks);
- Oil and Gas Companies (e.g. NNPC, SHELL, CHEVRONS);
- Central Bank of Nigeria;
- The Nigerian Arms, Navy, and Air Forces;
- The Nigerian Police Force;
- The Nigerian Para Military Forces (Such as: Nigerian Custom Service, Nigerian Prison, Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, NSCDC etc), and
- Institutions of higher learning (e.g. Universities, Polytechnics & Monotechnics) just to mention but few.

2.9.3. Benefits of a Career in Health Information Management

A career in health information management offers the following benefits:

- Excellent employment prospects in a fast-growing field;
- Opportunities to work in the computer industry or health industry (i.e. becoming ICT compliant);
- Opportunities to specialise in computing, financial and health services management, etc.
- Opportunities to work in public and private sectors;
- Useful skills that can be used throughout Nigeria and in many other Countries;
- Opportunities to work in research and consultancy firms, etc.
- Opportunities to establish publishing and consultancy firms;
- Opportunities to establish knowledge management and expert writing centres.

2.9.4. Undergraduate and Post-Graduate Study Prospects

It is worthy of note that the National Universities Commission (NUC) has approved the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for Bachelor of Health Information Management (B.HIM) as contained in the 2022 approved CCMAS for the Nigerian University System for Allied Health Sciences Programmes (NUC-CCMAS, 2022, Pages 257-291).

The CCMAS 30% Additions have also been developed by the Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria, to facilitate the immediate take-off of the Bachelor of Health Information Management (B.HIM) in Nigerian Universities. The outcome of these efforts provides an opportunity to be admitted into the Bachelor of Health Information Management (B.HIM) programme for young school leavers.

Therefore, to become a full–fledged health information management professional, one needs to complete an accredited undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The following Universities offer accredited Degree Programmes: Nigerian Universities (BHIM); University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria (MHIM), LATROBE University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (BHIM, MHIM, PhD-HIM); CURTIN University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia (BSc. HIM, MHIM & PhD HIM), North American University, U.S.A (B.Sc.-HIM), Babcock University, llisan Remo (PhD) and University of Willculson, USA (B.Sc.-HIM). Most of the American Universities are running the programme both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Furthermore, studies by either coursework or research, in areas such as Public Health, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, Health informatics, Archival and Records management (Suleiman, 2010), etc., may be undertaken at the Master's and PhD levels in most of the aforementioned Universities.

Therefore, career opportunities are available (both within and outside Nigeria) at Institutions of higher learning (e.g. Universities, Polytechnics & Mono-technics) as more Universities are getting approval from NUC for immediate take-off of the Bachelor of Health Information Management (B.HIM). Also, NBTE is being approached daily for immediate take-off of both ND and HND in Health Information Management by Polytechnics and Mono-technics.

2.9.5 Salary and Job Prospects

Omole (2013) submitted that health information management practitioners can earn salaries from $50,000 to $100,000 (dollars) in overseas countries. While from ₦100,000 to ₦800,000 (Naira) in Nigeria. Salaries are dependent on work setting, job industry, education level and certification. He stated further that health information management consultants can earn salaries in excess of $100,000 in overseas countries and up to ₦1,000,000 in Nigeria. Health information management professionals are in high demand everywhere, due to statutory regulation, which stipulates that all healthcare facilities must have an electronic health records system.

3.0.   Methodology

The method used in this paper is literature review, theoretical discussions and qualitative analysis, to draw inferences from existing literature that; roles of health information management professionals in achieving universal health coverage are enormous, and the career prospects of health information management practices in healthcare settings are very bright, as evident in previous research work and case studies.

4.0.   Summary of Findings

Major findings of the study are outlined below:

1. Access to health services enables people to be more productive and active contributors to their families and communities.
2. A health information management professional's career is positioned at the heart of the healthcare system.
3. Health information management Professional responsibilities cover the collection, storage, analysis and distribution of healthcare information.
4. Health information management professionals contribute to the healthcare system and to people's health by providing the information system and data, central to medical decision-making and patient care planning.
5. Health information management professionals coordinate many kinds of healthcare information from a variety of sources, of which are paper-based, but are increasingly being migrated to electronic patient records, including social, clinical, epidemiological and demographic data.
6. Health information management professionals are in high demand everywhere, due to statutory regulation which stipulates that all healthcare facilities must have an electronic health records system.

5.0.   CONCLUSION

This paper established that universal health coverage is a critical component of sustainable development and poverty reduction, and a key element of an effort to reduce social inequities. The study revealed that health information management professionals are to provide health information services to legitimate users in a timely version to achieve universal health coverage, which is the hallmark of a government's commitment to improve the wellbeing of all its citizens. It also unveiled that health information management professionals are in high demand at both private and public sectors of the economy, with attractive salaries that are capable of sustaining an individual in any country and that further studies by either course work or research are available at Bachelors, Masters and PhD degrees levels in Nigerian Universities and overseas countries. Health information management students and professionals are therefore enjoined to avail ourselves for these opportunities to acquire adequate knowledge and skills that will propel us to get to the Zenith of our chosen career.

6.0.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the content of this presentation the following recommendations are suggested for consideration and implementation:

1. Government at all levels should be commitment to universal health coverage to improve the wellbeing of all citizens.
2. Health information management professionals should regularly provide health information services to legitimate users in a timely version to achieve universal health coverage
3. Government and healthcare managers should encourage digitalization and professionalization of health information management department at all levels of healthcare
4. Government and healthcare managers should make funds available for the optimum service of health information systems.
5. Employment of health information management professionals should be done by government at all levels of healthcare delivery system for proper management of health information services.
6. Health information management professionals should be familiar with their professional ethic and schemes of service for each cadre in the profession, to enable them rise to the top echelon of their practices
7. All Nigerian Universities should embrace the running of health information management courses on their campuses to facilitate academic excellence and more career opportunities.

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