Assessment of the Impact of Training of Health Care Workers in Nigeria: The Role of Nurses Towards Effective Health Care Delivery

Dr Mezewo Emerinwe Obuzor
Department of Sociology, Rivers State University.
Mezewo.obuzor@ust.edu.ng

Dr Ruby Otomama Douglas
Sociology Department, Rivers State University.
ruby.douglas@ust.edu.ng
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Abstract
This paper examines the impact of training on healthcare workers in Nigeria, focusing on the unique roles of nurses in achieving effective healthcare delivery in tertiary health facilities. The study reveals that delivering high-quality, efficient health services is crucial for achieving universal health coverage. It emphasizes the need to strengthen health service delivery through evidence-based practices and restructuring efforts aligned with core values. The paper highlights the importance of integrating quality improvement principles into pre-service and in-service training programs to develop a competent workforce capable of delivering high-quality healthcare. It recommends improving training programs, enacting anti-corruption legislation to oversee the healthcare sector, and expanding postgraduate programs in medical social work.

Keywords: Healthcare Training, Nurses' Role, Effective Healthcare Delivery, Healthcare Workers, Nigeria, Universal Health Coverage, Quality Improvement, Continuing Education, Medical Social Work, Healthcare Access and Equity

Introduction

Health is paramount to individuals, families, and society as a whole. The growing concern for citizens' health has prompted healthcare professionals to explore ways to ensure effective healthcare delivery for all (Bichi, 2015). Education and training play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors of healthcare workers, ultimately impacting the quality of care they provide. High-quality healthcare service delivery involves providing the right care, at the right time, responding to patients' needs and preferences, while minimizing harm and resource waste (World Health Organization, OECD, and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2018).

Despite being an oil-rich nation, Nigeria faces significant challenges in providing accessible and affordable healthcare. The lack of comprehensive health insurance programs makes medical care expensive, leaving many citizens struggling to pay medical bills (Okoye, 2019). Effective healthcare is essential for achieving desired health outcomes and is characterized by effectiveness, safety, patient-centeredness, timeliness, equity, integration of care, and efficiency. To achieve universal health coverage, healthcare systems must prioritize planning and training programs that

address access, coverage, and financial protection. Continuous monitoring and assessment of training programs are essential to adapt to the ever-evolving healthcare landscape.

Training community healthcare workers can address workforce shortages and improve access to care. These individuals, often from the communities they serve, are trained to deliver specific health services, conduct surveillance, and provide treatment for communicable and non-communicable diseases. They bridge cultural and linguistic barriers, expand access to care, and create new employment opportunities. Evidence demonstrates their effectiveness in delivering safe and cost-effective care for childhood illnesses, reducing the spread of diseases, promoting nutrition, and providing family planning services (Merten et al., 2010).

Training healthcare workers for effective service delivery aims to identify and strengthen their strengths as practitioners, enabling them to deliver high-quality, knowledgeable care. It provides an opportunity to evaluate their abilities, identify knowledge gaps, and address areas for improvement through targeted training. Training brings healthcare workers together outside their typical work environment, fostering collaboration and professional development. The demand for effective healthcare is distinct from the demand for consumer products and services. While the latter is driven by direct consumption, the former is driven by the value of improved health outcomes. Training demonstrates the value placed on healthcare workers and their success in their roles. With appropriate training, healthcare workers can diversify their skills and contribute to effective healthcare service delivery (World Health Organization, OECD, and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2018).

Statement of the Problem
The healthcare service industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors in developing countries, meeting the needs and demands of a growing population (Miriti et al., 2017). However, in Nigeria, the healthcare system faces significant challenges. Less than one quarter of healthcare facilities have reliable water, sanitation, and electricity, hindering the ability of healthcare workers to effectively treat patients. The mission of effective healthcare systems, which is to expand to meet the population's health needs and expectations regarding patient care, is progressing slowly. An estimated 25% of Nigeria's current health expenditure is lost due to ineffectiveness and a lack of quality service delivery (McKing Izeiza Amedari et al., 2021). As a result, Nigeria ranks 142 out of 195 countries in a Lancet report ranking health systems performance based on healthcare access and quality. The country also ranks poorly on the World Bank's Universal Health Coverage Service Coverage Index (Fullman et al., 2018; World Bank, 2017).

These challenges are exacerbated by weak governance and accountability systems, poorly remunerated healthcare workers, and poorly enforced transparency mechanisms and procurement laws. As a result, basic necessities for effective healthcare facilities, such as clean water, reliable electricity, good sanitation, and safe waste disposal, are often absent (Onwujekwe et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). The Nigerian health sector, particularly in terms of training healthcare workers and providing effective healthcare services, is one of the worst performing sectors in the country.

This research aims to determine the impact of training healthcare practitioners on effective healthcare service delivery, with a focus on the role of nurses. Specifically, the research seeks to:

Examine the roles of healthcare workers, particularly nurses, in effective healthcare service delivery.
Identify the obstacles to effective healthcare service delivery.

Research Questions:
1. What are the roles of healthcare workers, particularly nurses, in effective healthcare service delivery?
2. What are the impediments to effective healthcare service delivery?

Theoretical Framework
This study adopts the structural functionalist perspective, which views society as a structure with interrelated parts. The theory posits that society is a living organism composed of component parts that function harmoniously for the survival of the whole system. If any part fails to contribute to the success of the system, the system will malfunction. This perspective highlights the interdependence of various parts within the system, where the function of one part affects the system as a whole. Similarly, the lack of training for healthcare workers can negatively impact the effective delivery of healthcare services to patients. Conversely, training healthcare workers, particularly nurses, can improve the delivery of effective healthcare. The relevance of functionalism to this study lies in its demonstration of how the lack of training can disrupt the smooth functioning of the healthcare system.

Conceptual Clarifications
Focusing on Social Work in Healthcare in Nigeria:
It is impossible to analyze the training of healthcare workers for effective service delivery without considering the role of social work in healthcare in Nigeria. Social work in healthcare originated with missionaries who took over healthcare delivery from the colonial government in northern Nigeria. The outbreak of communicable disease epidemics and illnesses like hypertension and ulcers in the early 20th century highlighted the limitations of medical investigations alone in addressing these issues (Idyorough, 2008). This led to the concession of healthcare delivery to missionaries who provided social services and care alongside medical treatment. However, provision for healthcare social workers was not made until the 1950s, when almoners began to provide care.

Social work has been an integral part of medical care in Nigeria since the colonial era. It has undergone various developmental stages in terms of practice, policy descriptions, motivations, personnel, and community sanctions. These factors have significantly influenced current social work practices in Nigeria and serve as benchmarks for evaluating its effectiveness.

The roles of social workers in healthcare in Nigeria are similar to those of social workers worldwide. They primarily focus on the psychosocial well-being of patients, addressing social and psychological problems to alleviate distress during treatment (Oyeniyi, 2010). Social workers in Nigeria work in multidisciplinary teams with other healthcare professionals, including medical doctors, nurses, psychologists, dieticians, and midwives. They are typically housed within a unit in the health facility's department, often called social welfare, social work, public health social work, or volunteer service. Due to the limited recognition of social work in the region, many

medical facilities prefer the term "social welfare unit" as it is more familiar to the public (Ezeh & Mbah, 2004). The Task-Shifting and Task-Sharing Policy for Essential Health Care Services in Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Health, 2014) outlines the roles and services of social workers in healthcare.

These roles and services are derived from the curriculum and texts used to train social workers at various institutions and from practical experience. They align with the policy directives and role recommendations of the country's healthcare providers (Bichi, 2015; Oyeniyi, 2010; Idyorough, 2008). The mission statement of the Nigeria Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2016) emphasizes the role of social workers in enabling psychosocial well-being while patients address their medical conditions.

Social workers are employed by federal government-owned health facilities and a few tertiary health facilities owned by state governments, such as Lagos, Ekiti, and Kaduna. Private facilities rarely employ social workers (Bichi, 2015). The lack of quality social welfare institutions and health insurance in Nigeria exposes citizens to various social anomalies and dysfunction. Some patients may encounter social workers for the first time upon admission to a medical facility. Patients with severe psychosocial problems may overwhelm social workers with their issues, believing them to be experts in their field despite limited training. Many patients are reluctant to talk for fear of sharing family secrets with an "outsider." Despite these challenges, social workers in healthcare settings must act as brokers, mediators, advocates, and enablers to connect patients with essential services.

Training of Health Workers for Effective Service Delivery:
Healthcare workers recognize that service delivery processes and patient satisfaction feedback provide valuable insights into service quality perceptions and the specific processes that influence quality healthcare services. Nurses, as the largest group of hospital workers interacting directly with patients and other healthcare workers, play a critical role in achieving quality objectives and healthcare service outcomes, such as patient satisfaction. Their views, opinions, and perceptions are crucial for understanding and improving the quality of healthcare services.

Nurses are well-positioned to contribute to and lead transformative changes in healthcare due to their role, education, and earned respect (Susan & Echevarria, 2017). They understand the factors driving the mandates for practice change and the competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) needed for personal and system-wide success in healthcare delivery. The shift from episodic, provider-based, fee-for-service care to team-based, patient-centered care across the continuum requires nurses to be full partners in achieving the triple aim of improved patient experience, improved health outcomes, and reduced healthcare costs.

Training healthcare workers for effective service delivery not only evaluates their abilities and skills but also identifies knowledge gaps and areas for improvement. It seeks to discover and strengthen their strengths, enabling them to deliver effective, quality, and knowledgeable service to society.

Key Characteristics of Effective Healthcare Service Delivery:
According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010), effective service delivery is a vital component of any health system. It is a fundamental input to population health status, alongside other factors, including social determinants of health. While the organization and content of health services vary across countries, a well-functioning health system possesses the following key characteristics:

Comprehensiveness: A comprehensive range of health services is provided, tailored to the needs of the target population, including preventative, curative, palliative, rehabilitative services, and health promotion activities.
Accessibility: Services are readily and permanently accessible without undue barriers of cost, language, culture, or geography. Health services are located close to the population, with a routine point of entry at the primary care level. Services can be provided in the home, community, workplace, or health facilities as appropriate.
Coverage: Service delivery is designed to cover all individuals within a defined target population, including the sick and healthy, all income groups, and all social groups.
Continuity: Service delivery is organized to ensure continuity of care across the network of services, health conditions, levels of care, and over the life cycle.
Quality: Health services are of high quality, meaning they are effective, safe, patient-centered, and timely.
Person-centeredness: Services are organized around the individual, not the disease or financing. Users perceive health services to be responsive and acceptable to them. The target population participates in service delivery design and assessment. Individuals are partners in their own healthcare.
Coordination: Local area health service networks are actively coordinated across types of providers, types of care, levels of service delivery, and for both routine and emergency preparedness. The patient's primary care provider facilitates access to needed services and collaborates with other levels and types of providers. Coordination also occurs with other sectors (e.g., social services) and partners (e.g., community organizations).
Accountability and Efficiency: Health services are well-managed to achieve the core elements described above with minimal resource waste. Managers are granted the necessary authority to achieve planned objectives and are held accountable for overall performance and results. Assessment includes mechanisms for participation from the target population and civil society.

Defining Quality and Effectiveness in Healthcare
The effectiveness and quality of healthcare training are measured by the degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with current professional knowledge. This definition implies that quality and effectiveness can be measured, are ultimately aimed at health improvements, and should reflect the desires of key stakeholders, including service users and communities. This definition encompasses both curative and preventive care, as well as facility and community-based care for individuals and populations. It acknowledges the need for mechanisms to systematically incorporate new evidence into service delivery.

Ineffective healthcare, where providers do not adhere to evidence-based guidelines, reflects a lack of knowledge or compliance. The effectiveness of healthcare workers can be assessed through

medical record inspection, patient exit interviews, and direct observation of provider-client interactions, standardized patients, or clinical vignettes. While clinical vignettes measure a provider's knowledge of evidence-based protocols, other methods primarily capture compliance with these guidelines. Standardized patients provide consistent cases of illness to providers, allowing for comparison of quality of care across providers.

The Role of Nurses in Ensuring Effective Healthcare Delivery

Nursing is the backbone of any health system. Nurses foster exceptional individual relationships with patients and serve as guardians, embodying a blend of professional and emotional support. Trained healthcare workers understand that service delivery processes and patient satisfaction feedback provide valuable insights into service quality perceptions. This information is crucial for improving healthcare services in Nigeria, where the system faces significant challenges.

Defining Nursing and the Role of Nurses

International Council of Nurses (ICN, 2014), argued that "Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems management, and education are also key nursing roles."

The American Nurses Association (ANA) defines nursing as "the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations."

Trained nurses are obligated to provide care to individuals of all ages, including the elderly, sick, and disabled. Patient care is their primary duty, and they spend significant time with patients. Nurses assess and observe patients, assist doctors in creating care plans, and carry out those plans through medication and treatment administration. They utilize various medical equipment for monitoring and treatment, perform diagnostic tests, take vital signs, and interpret results.

Nurses assume a variety of roles and functions, including caregiver, leader, change agent, teacher, manager, case manager, counselor, client advocate, research consumer, and more. These roles are constantly evolving to meet the needs of patients. Nurses work both independently and as part of a team to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate care (ICN, 2002).

Nurses are responding to the challenges and evolving nature of their professional roles, exploring their underlying values and identity, and adapting to meet the needs of a dynamic healthcare system (Delgado et al., 2019). Today's nurses are technologically savvy and demonstrate cost efficiency while providing quality care. They are not confined to bedside care but are taking on positions of greater responsibility. Their responsibilities include extensive paperwork and documentation, recording patient histories, current symptoms, and documenting all aspects of patient care, including medication administration. Being a nurse involves executing a multitude of roles in service to health and healthcare, intertwined with the individual's identity, talents, and values. Nurses are defined by the roles they play and their personal identity, which provides the substance

and motivation for their work. Despite their crucial contributions, nurses are often undervalued and labeled as "doctors' assistants."

The Importance of Nurses in Effective Healthcare Delivery

Nurses are the underappreciated heroes of the healthcare system. They provide over 90% of healthcare worldwide but are often overlooked when acknowledging healthcare providers. Trained nurses, regardless of age, gender, or relationship to the patient, provide essential care and support. They are skilled in managing the feelings of patients and their families. However, nurses often struggle to articulate the unique aspects of their work beyond basic tasks like medication administration, documentation, and communication with team members.

Nurses are essential for achieving effective, high-quality, and cost-effective healthcare. They are positioned to contribute to and lead transformative changes in healthcare by being full partners in the inter-professional team. The shift to team-based, patient-centered care requires a new or enhanced set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes around wellness and population care, with a renewed focus on patient-centered care, care coordination, data analytics, and quality improvement. Nurses are crucial for achieving the triple aim of improved patient experience, improved health outcomes, and reduced healthcare costs.

Here are seven reasons why nurses are so important in ensuring effective healthcare delivery in Nigeria:

1. Emotional Labor: Nurses perform emotional labor that not everyone can handle. They work with individuals ranging from newborns to those nearing death. Nursing is one of the most emotionally demanding jobs, requiring immense strength. Nurses consistently go into work with a smile on their face, despite the challenges they face. It is essential to focus on their emotional well-being alongside their physical and mental well-being.

2. Broad Knowledge Base: While nurses can specialize, they are often required to have a broad understanding of various medical fields. They may need to assist patients with issues ranging from oncology to gynecology. Nurses must learn as much as possible to effectively help every patient who comes through the door. Their passion and dedication demonstrate their commitment to providing comprehensive care.

3. Addressing Bodily Functions and Death: Nurses assist patients with bodily functions and provide compassionate end-of-life care. They help families cope with grief and deal with loss in a healthy way.

4. Long Hours: Nurses work long shifts to provide support and relief to their teams. Despite fatigue, they maintain a high standard of care for their patients.

5. Advocacy: Nurses are often the strongest advocates for their patients. Doctors may have limited time to engage with patients beyond reviewing charts and brief meetings, so they may not be fully aware of daily issues and pain levels. Nurses spend significant time with patients, creating treatment plans, assisting with care, and advocating for their needs.

6. Appreciation: Nurses perform incredibly hard work while facing comments about being "just a nurse." They are often disregarded and do not receive the appreciation they deserve. However, they never let this deter them from providing the best possible care.

6. Strong Actions Against Corruption in the Nigerian Health Sector:

A recent systematic review of corruption in the Nigerian health sector (Ambelie, 2014) identified prevalent forms of corruption, including drug malpractices, absenteeism, bribes, and embezzlement. Corruption undermines the implementation of actions to ensure effective healthcare delivery (Wanjau & Muiruri, 2012). It leads to increased healthcare costs, drug shortages, and avoidable mortalities, particularly in primary healthcare centers (PHCs) (Ambelie, 2014; Wanjau et al., 2012). The Federal Ministry of Health's ability to effectively oversee the health sector is weakened by a lack of adequate information on health outcomes, resources, costs, and service utilization across all levels of government (Hafez, 2018). As a result, many Nigerians, especially those in rural areas, lack access to basic and quality healthcare. This lack of awareness has led to the widespread spread and deaths from preventable diseases, such as diabetes, malaria, tuberculosis, and influenza.

Efforts to monitor trends in healthcare quality for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be ineffective without consensus on key indicators that are comparable across countries and collected regularly. Empirical evidence from quality measurement research indicates global gaps in all domains of quality health services. These gaps present opportunities to improve the quality of care and the health of populations.

7. Discussion of Findings:

This section analyzes the research questions and presents the findings of the study. Data collected from in-depth interviews was used for analysis. The primary objective of this research was to assess the impact of training healthcare workers in Nigeria on effective healthcare delivery, focusing on the role of nurses in a teaching hospital in Port Harcourt.

7.1 Research Question 1: What are the roles of healthcare workers, particularly nurses, in effective healthcare service delivery?

The literature review reveals that nursing is the backbone of any health system. Nurses foster exceptional individual relationships with patients and serve as guardians, embodying a blend of professional and emotional support. Trained healthcare workers understand that service delivery processes and patient satisfaction feedback provide valuable insights into service quality perceptions. This information is crucial for improving healthcare services in Nigeria, where the system faces significant challenges. Training healthcare workers, particularly nurses, helps alleviate workforce shortages. Nurses are trained to deliver specific health services, conduct surveillance, and provide treatment for communicable and non-communicable diseases. They bridge cultural and linguistic barriers, expand access to care, and create new employment opportunities. They are capable of delivering safe and cost-effective care for childhood illnesses, reducing the spread of diseases, promoting nutrition, and providing family planning services. Nurses are well-positioned to contribute to and lead transformative changes in healthcare due to their role, education, and earned respect. They understand the factors driving the mandates for practice change and the competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) needed for personal and system-wide success in healthcare delivery. The shift from episodic, provider-based, fee-for-service care to team-based, patient-centered care across the continuum requires nurses to be full partners in achieving the triple aim of improved patient experience, improved health outcomes, and reduced healthcare costs.

7.2 Research Question 2:   What are the impediments to effective healthcare service delivery?*

Corruption is a significant impediment to effective healthcare delivery in Nigeria. It manifests in various forms, including drug malpractices, absenteeism, bribes, and embezzlement. Corruption undermines the implementation of actions to ensure effective healthcare delivery. It leads to increased healthcare costs, drug shortages, and avoidable mortalities, particularly in primary healthcare centers (PHCs). The Federal Ministry of Health's ability to effectively oversee the health sector is weakened by a lack of adequate information on health outcomes, resources, costs, and service utilization across all levels of government. As a result, many Nigerians, especially those in rural areas, lack access to basic and quality healthcare. This lack of awareness has led to the widespread spread and deaths from preventable diseases, such as diabetes, malaria, tuberculosis, and influenza.

Conclusion:
Nurses are poised to assume roles that advance health, improve care, and increase value. However, this will require new ways of thinking and practicing. Shifting from a focus on disease episodes to promoting health and care across the continuum is essential. Partnering with patients and their families to understand their social context and engage them in care strategies to meet patient-defined outcomes is crucial. Gaining greater awareness of resources across the continuum and within the community is needed to connect patients with the care and support they need for optimal well-being. Tracking outcomes as a measure of effectiveness and leading and participating in ongoing improvement to ensure excellence will require exceptional teamwork. "Nurses can no longer take a back seat—the time has come for nursing, at the heart of patient care, to take the lead in the revolution to making healthcare more patient-centered and quality-driven" (Salmond, 2015).

In summary, ensuring high-quality and effective health services through the training of healthcare workers, particularly nurses, is essential. It involves providing the right care, at the right time, responding to service users' needs and preferences, while minimizing harm and resource waste. Quality healthcare increases the likelihood of desired health outcomes and is consistent with seven measurable characteristics: effectiveness, safety, patient-centeredness, timeliness, equity, integration of care, and efficiency. Regardless of a country's income level, if there is room for improving health outcomes, the quality of care can also be increased.

Recommendations:
1. Professionalization of Social Work: Since the passage of the social work bill into law, practitioners should embark on its long-awaited professionalization and train its workforce.
2. Increased Involvement of Social Workers: The social work association of Nigeria (AMSWON) should collaborate with international representatives to encourage government involvement of social workers in managing tertiary, secondary, and primary health centers throughout the country.
3. Improved Training Programs: Training programs for healthcare workers, particularly nurses, should be improved to ensure they provide the right care, at the right time, and meet service users' needs and preferences while minimizing harm and resource waste.
4. Anti-Corruption Legislation: There is an urgent need to promulgate a law against corruption to oversee the entire healthcare sector and ensure effective healthcare delivery to patients. The government's approach should be more holistic and transparent, with citizen involvement to achieve its objectives.

5. Expansion of Medical Social Work Programs: The postgraduate program in social work at Rivers State University should be expanded to offer programs in medical social work. This will provide practicing social workers in healthcare settings with the opportunity to acquire core medical social work knowledge.

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