

HEALTH INFORMATION SERVICES FOR THE YOUNG IN SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA.

Dr Nwafor-Orizu Ejeagwu OBIANUJU

Health Librarian, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Anambra State.

eo-nwafor-orizu@unizik.edu.ng +2348034072720

Introduction

Health information services include all the library can do to provide access to quality health information resources for patrons. It may be in areas of acquisition, cataloguing, reference, special programmes or online services and even referrals. It can also be referred to as health literacy services or consumer health information services.

According to the constitution of the World Health Organization (1948) "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." The Constitution was adopted by the International Health Conference held in New York from 19 June to 22 July 1946 and entered into force on 7 April 1948. On the hand, health information can be described as that knowledge, facts and news generated from various sources, necessary for good physical and mental condition of human beings (Benton:2009). Successful life hinges on quality health, while quality health hinges on exposure to authentic health information that impacts on lifestyle choices and insures wellbeing. Availability of health information resources right from school and public libraries will strategically produce healthy individuals and communities.

School and public libraries are key to impacting relevant knowledge to children and adolescents for lifelong usage, if properly harnessed. "It is in child-hood and youth that all kinds of literacy skills are best built. The earlier a person starts to access information, the more efficient and life-long this access will be" (IFLA: n.d.). The goal of library health services for the young is to produce a generation of healthy people who can take informed decisions about their health and that of their families and communities. Healthy lifestyle choices arise from imbibed health information.

Child's right to information

Every child has a right to information. The first line of article 17 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNICEF: 2017), states that "Children have the right to get information that is important to their health and well-being" Also article 24 on health and health services, states that "children have the right to good quality health care; the best health care possible; to safe drinking water; nutritious food; a clean and safe environment and information to help them stay healthy"

The importance of the child's right to information is its encompassing role pervading all aspects of life (Gathia; 1997) including health. It endows the child with the right to all necessary information. As the number one public institution reposed with the responsibility of information provision across boarder, it becomes mandatory for libraries to provide health information for the young readers. Inability to institute this service or gross inefficiency in its provision is tantamount to denial of the rights of the child.

Types of Health Information Services in School and Public Libraries

Libraries helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through health services.

The achievement of the SDGs requires concerted multi sectional input from stakeholders including school and public libraries. Health information is cardinal to the attainment and sustenance of the goals, be it in social, economic or environmental aspects. Health information dissemination assures health literacy. Health literacy empowers individuals to effectively access, interpret and use health information to protect themselves, their communities and society at large. Ending poverty (SDG#1), ending hunger (SDG#2), quality education(SDG#4), gender equality (SDG#5), clean water and sanitation (SDG#6), decent work and economic growth (SDG#8), reducing inequalities(SDG#10), sustainable cities and communities(SDG#11) and responsible consumption and production(SDG#12) are all directly or indirectly linked to health. None of these can be meaningfully achieved in an environment laden with diseases and low health literacy rates. Therefore, investing in health information services for the young will facilitate the achievement of 2030 goals and beyond.

Libraries helping to achieve the African Union Agenda 2063 through health services.

The African Union agenda 2063 “The AFRICA WE WANT” (2015) has seven aspirations. They are mostly dependent on health. For instance, item ten under ASPIRATION 1 declares “that Africa shall be a prosperous continent, with the means and resources to drive its own development, with sustainable and long-term stewardship of its resources and where:

1. African people have a high standard of living, and quality of life, sound health and well-being;
2. Well educated and skilled citizens, underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society is the norm and no child misses school due to poverty or any form of discrimination”

Year 2063 is a long way to go from now and there is ample time to strategise for success. If school and public libraries start now to impact on the health of future Africans, the fruits will definitely contribute to the achievement of our 'aspirations'. Legislation to include health services as a prominent mission of school and public libraries across the continent should be a priority. This will be a cost effective and lasting plan to disseminate the much needed health information to young Africans.

Reducing global disease burden through library health services.

The world is beset with communicable and non-communicable diseases. These diseases increase the mortality and morbidity rates within and across nations and drastically reduce the impact of developmental strides and governments' huge investments in many sectors. For instance, the World Health Organisation (2017) statistics shows that of the 57 million global deaths in 2008, 36 million, (63%) were due to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). The four main NCD are cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes and chronic lung diseases. The burden of these diseases is rising disproportionately among lower income countries and populations. In 2008, nearly 80% of noncommunicable disease deaths (29 million) occurred in low- and

middle-income countries including Nigeria. The WHO Noncommunicable Diseases Country Profiles (2014) indicates that in Nigeria, the probability of dying between ages 30 and 70 years from the 4 main NCDs is 20%. Most of these premature deaths are linked to common risk factors, namely tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol and are largely preventable. Library services for young readers can help drag down these scaring figures by systematically promoting preventive messages and modifiable lifestyle changes to combat the NCDs. These changes can be brought about by equipping the youth with right information early in life.

Communicable diseases like laser fever and cholera threatening parts of the country on almost regular basis can be controlled if children learn hand washing habits and other simple hygiene routine and facts from school and public libraries.

Complementing Nigerian school curriculum

Physical and Health Education (PHE) is a subject taken in primary through secondary schools in Nigeria. It covers health education component to help pupils and students be more health conscious. The textbooks are colourfully designed with attractive illustrations to arouse and sustain students' interest. However, investigation needs to be carried out on how far the physical and health education curriculum is being covered by schools. Also to be found out is how qualified the teachers are to handle the topics effectively. How Nigerian students transfer the PHE lessons into practical life besides the classroom also needs investigation. At any rate, the library needs to constantly reinforce what has been taught through its services. Children have short memory, but constant and well-designed messages leaves indelible impressions on their minds.

Providing health information services in libraries: Guide for Librarians

To initiate, develop and sustain health information services to young patrons in school and public libraries, the following steps can guide the librarians:

Develop the collection

Health information services to the young readers starts with developing the collection from diverse sources. Books, journals, health related videos, wall charts and posters need be acquired. Also subscription to health databases like Medline plus is ideal. World Health Organization materials are normally comprehensive, authentic and mostly free and should therefore flood the collection. Care must be taken to include literature from only authoritative sources.

Provide easy access to medical literature.

With proper identification and organisation of the materials, young library patrons will easily locate needed medical literature. Cataloguing of both hard and online resources will also be of help. Health information reference services should be consciously planned and offered by staff.

Compile accurate information from medical literature

Depending on the health information requirements of the communities, the librarian may decide to summarise facts on popular health issues. This is to present facts on a particular health topic together in simplified format for young readers. It may even be in vernacular and presented in form of pamphlets, flyers, leaflets or articles.

Evaluate information from authentic sources.

Health information charlatans, quacks and product marketers have flooded the internet. To circumvent this, the librarians should frequently scrutinize the subject content from established health authorities. They can also seek clarification from doctors where need be.

Carve out health corner in the school or public libraries

The library may consider carving out a space for health collection and reference services. It may be a shelf loaded with health materials and a desk. Colourful posters, images and drawings of vital health subjects should adorn the corner.

Make referrals.

Some adolescents may find it convenient to complain or bare their health concerns to the librarians. Providing them with available literature and links is primary, but may not always be enough. Where need be, they should promptly be advised and referred to school clinic or hospitals for diagnosis and treatment. The librarians should use their discretion in applying the limits.

Bulletin board

News, facts and reports on current health issues as they relate to the young readers should be prominently pasted on the notice boards. Once this format suites their taste they are likely to frequent the board for regular updates.

Use library websites

Well customised library websites should include health corner or gallery for health news, stories and photos.

Use social media apart from the library websites

The library has everything it needs to reach the young patrons on the social media. From twitter, library blog, e-magazine, Facebook page to WhatsApp, wiki, email, among others. The libraries should exploit these possibilities as needed. One health topic can be thrown up for discussion every week within groups as the librarian may form or moderate.

Complement advertisement

Product advertisement for dangerous stuff like tobacco, alcohol, and sugar sweetened food and beverages are not expected to be explicit enough. They are meant to entice not to scare. But libraries must expose more truths to save the health of children and young adults. For instance, the warning “smokers are liable to die young” on cigarettes packets does not give the full message. The libraries may go further by adding “Cigarette smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals, including 43 known cancer-causing

compounds and 400 other toxins". The later may be hard enough to scare the adolescents away from ever smoking. Also soft drink advertisements may be countered with facts like 'sugary drinks increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions'. The librarian will choose where and how best to display or present the information.

Special programs

Guest speakers may be invited to educate the children and adolescents on prevalent health issues in the communities. Such occasions will be interactive with question and answer sessions to benefit the audience. Special events may also be organized to mark special health days using World Health Organisation calendar (2017). Days like:

February 4th - World Cancer Day

February 6th - International day of zero tolerance to female genital mutilation

March 23rd - World Meteorological day

March 24th - World Tuberculosis day

April 24th - 30th - World Immunization Week

April 25th - World Malaria Day

May 31st - World No-Tobacco Day

June 14th - World Blood Donor Day

July 28th - World Hepatitis Day

August 1st-7th - World Breastfeeding Week

September 10th - World Suicide Prevention Day

September 28th - World Rabies Day

September 29th - World Heart Day

October 10th - World mental Health day

October 12th - World Sight Day

November 12th- World Pneumonia Day

November 14th - World Diabetes Day

November 15th - World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day

November 19th - World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims

November 19th - World Toilet Day

Bulletin boards should announce beforehand, the coming of these special days to moist the readers' appetite for more information on the subject.

Sources of health information

Books, journals, internet, electronic media reports, newsletters, flyers, electronic databases, technical reports, and grey literature are all good sources of health information for the young readers. Emphasis should be laid on e-resources and online collection as today's young readers are "internet citizens" who prefer to get information online. Local or cultural content will be developed by the librarians from the served community. Collecting local health issues in Nigeria is very essential. Scientific and evidence-based health information should be packaged in simple ways to counter superstitious and crude cultural practices harmful to the lives of young Nigerians.

Typical sample library projects from other countries

Reports from the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section (CHILD) of International Federation of Library Association's (IFLA) gave some insights on how some libraries are supporting development by providing access to health information for children and young adults.

These reports are from public libraries and librarians in Burkina Faso, Uganda, Romania, Napel and Singapore.

In Burkina Faso, libraries in Tuy village are teaching teenage girls in four rural communities to use smart phones to research the internet for health information.

Uganda Community Libraries Association is organising health and technology camps for rural children in five communities. Through this project, 100 children have the opportunity to learn about nutrition and sensitive sexual health issues.

Librarians from Brasov, Romania had put into practice a project for children's health education through sports. It is a new free library service. With the new sports equipment purchased, thanks to funding and with support from their coaches, the children learned and applied the information.

In Nepal, Community Information Centre located at Bhairahawa organises a programme termed "Say no to drugs and violence". The project uses dance competitions to create awareness among the young students against drugs and violence.

"My Tree House" Green Children's Library for Kids in Singapore, is the first library in the world to be steered by green principles in all facets from design, infrastructure and use of sustainable materials, to collections and programming. It is built to encourage children to explore, discover and challenge their curiosity in learning about and caring for the environment (IFLA: 2013).

These projects are quite instructive. They represent unique innovations by libraries around the world to raise health literacy levels of the young to tackle peculiar health problems of their communities. Different young communities in Nigeria are beset by handful of health problems that can be lessened by easing their access to health information. Health challenges abound in and around us for librarians to help with. Guinea worm, cholera, polio, meningitis, substance abuse and many other health hazards stand between the Nigerian child, his future and the future of the country. Projects can be initiated around these diseases. Peculiar problems need peculiar solutions.

Health Information services: Implications for the librarian

- a. Rendering effective health information services in the school and public libraries may best be achieved if the librarians are trained for the purpose. Such level of training will equip them with the knowledge of and skills in the identification,

- selection, organization, and dissemination of health information.
- b. In attending to the health information needs of the young, the librarians should know the boundaries. Precaution should be taken not to step into diagnosis, treatment or drug prescription.
 - c. Understanding the psychology and characteristics of the young clients is also vital. Young people are known to be very inquisitive and yet shy, especially in seeking answers to health issues and so need to be intuitively served.
 - d. Advocacy had become a vital tool for successful library practice especially in a country like Nigeria. Stakeholders should be enlightened on the global importance of consumer health information to elicit their full support in policy and funding.
 - e. Collaboration with core health professionals and agencies is inevitable. This is more so in Nigeria where most school and public librarians do not have health information services background by training. Besides, health is a sensitive and specialized area that must be trod with care. No health information should be taken for granted as that may mar a life! It is the best practice to build working relationship with medical experts. Librarians should involve them as need be like for special programs and content clarifications. For instance, compilations by the librarian on specific diseases should best be edited by medical doctors and public health experts.
 - f. Rapid changes in health information demands that the librarian must keep track of latest developments. Subscription to newsletters of health agencies like WHO and other specialized research bodies will be quite helpful.
 - g. Attending relevant health-related conferences and workshops at different levels keeps the librarians abreast of current trends. This also helps build the confidence required to offer health information services to the young readers.
 - h. The librarians should device means of assessing the effectiveness of the health information services from time to time. Evaluation creates room for improvement.

Policy requirements

- i. Time for the standardization of health information services in Nigerian libraries is now. The institutional objective and mission statement of libraries in Nigeria should be quickly expanded to include health information services. This has become especially cogent for school and public libraries to raise the health literacy levels of young Nigerians. How best can Nigerian libraries serve our father land than by producing health literate generations of Nigerians, and a country with less disease burden?
- ii. Once health is of urgent global importance for the achievement of SDGs and beyond, course related to health information services should no more be optional or reserved for only intending medical librarians. The Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria should reflect this in the curriculum for library schools. Every student passing through library school should have a fair knowledge of health information services. Standard courses on consumer health information are now available. Courses like:

Beyond an Apple a Day: Providing Consumer Health Information at Your Library
Health & Wellness @ the Library: The Essentials of Providing Consumer Health Service

Getting Started with Information Outreach in Your Community
Health on the Range: Rural Health Issues and Resources
Making PubMed Work for You

Promoting Health Literacy Through Easy-to-Read Materials

These may be included into mainstream curriculum or done on continuing education (CE) bases. These will prepare and equip young Nigerian librarians with the requisite primary knowledge of health information resources and services. Librarians should disseminate all information more so those needed for the direct wellbeing and survival of the human being.

References

- African Union Commission (2015). Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Final edition. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>
- Benton, D. (2009). (CHILD2015) Press release: lack of healthcare information threaten patient safety, say leading health agencies CHILD 2015@group.org.
- Gathia, J. (1997). The Rights of the Child Convention and Right to Information. *PUCL Bulletin*. Retrieved from <http://www.pucl.org/from-archives/Child/convention.htm>
- IFLA (2013). IFLA Section CHILD Newsletter, Retrieved from <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/libraries-for-children-and-ya/newsletters/newsletterjun2013a.pdf>
- IFLA (n.d.) How libraries for children and young adults are supporting development by providing access to information. Libraries for children and young adults section (CHILD) IFLA Section CHILD Newsletters. Retrieved from: www.ifla.org/publications/libraries-forchildren-and-young-adults-section-newsletter.
- Medical Library Association (2017). Consumer Health Course List. Retrieved from: <http://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=494>
- UNICEF (2017). FACT SHEET: A summary of the rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf
- World Health Organisation Calender (2017). retrieved from <https://www.vercalendario.info/en/event/days-unitednations-year-calendar-2017.html>
- World Health Organisation (2017) Constitution of WHO: principles. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>
- World Health Organization (2017). Noncommunicable diseases and mental health: Noncommunicable diseases country profiles 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/nmh/countries/en/>