



Research article

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Influence of top management supports on records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background/Objectives: Records are important sources of information and knowledge and they constitute evidence of a person's or an organisation's activity. Records are important for decision making, accountability and reconstruction of past activities. Records Management Practices entail creation, maintenance, use, retention and disposition of records and they are essential to guarantee access to volumes of valuable records generated as a result of operational functions in tertiary hospitals. There had been reported cases of poor patients' health records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. **Design/Methods:** This study examined the influence of top management supports on records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. The expose facto design was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of 493 licensed Health Information Management professionals (Records Managers) in the sixteen tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria and total enumeration was adopted. The instrument used was a self-developed questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regressions at 0.05 significant level. **Results:** Findings show high level (and efficient) health records management practices and a relatively though inadequate influence of top management supports on health records management practices. **Conclusion:** Top management supports should be considered as fundamental in the establishment and running of records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria.

Keywords: Records management practices, Decision making, Patient care, Tertiary hospital

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INTRODUCTION

Records are proof of a person or an organisation's activity and are important in decision making, accountability and reconstructing past activities. Records are important sources of information and knowledge. According to Sherperd, records act as evidence of an activity or action undertaken by an individual or group in the course of business, which results in a definable outcome¹. Records assist the management of an organisation to make timely, relevant and informed decisions, thereby, contributing to the sustainable socioeconomic and the development of the organisation. Records are considered vital and of great value to every organisation as they are created for various purposes. This is especially, the patients' health records. For these purposes to be achieved, there must be proper and effective records management practices. Proper management of

records is therefore imperative to ensure easy access and quick retrieval of information required for decision-making.

Records management practices entail the efficient and systematic creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records. Literature described records management practices as the creation, maintenance and use, retention and disposition of records, when they become inactive and no longer serve the purpose for which they are created²⁻⁴. The importance of records management practices in every organisation, particularly tertiary hospital cannot be over-emphasized. Records management practices increase access to information, improve operational efficiency, ensure safety of vital records, promote regulatory compliance as well as support decision making⁵.

The patient's health records are one of the tertiary hospital's most valuable assets. They

document the cause of the patient illness, treatment plan, support decision making, demonstrate compliance and perhaps most importantly, enable quality healthcare services⁶. The primary goal of records management practices is to ensure that records created in the course of organisation activities can be easily accessed and retrieved by legitimate users when needed and are properly disposed when they passed their retention period⁷. Good records management practices are therefore, critical to the effective management of tertiary hospital operational activities.

Good health records management practices in tertiary hospitals promote and support operational services, health services decision making, policy formulation and management actions. Spherperd posited that a record is not defined by its physical form, its age or the fact that it contains information, its essential characteristic is that it provides valid evidence of activities carried out¹. Good records management practices in tertiary hospitals maybe supported or hindered by top management supports. Touray opines that poor management of records does not only hinder development process, but can lead to ineffectiveness and inefficiency in tertiary hospital service delivery⁸. Good records management practices are fundamental and very important in the management of tertiary hospitals services.

Studies abound that health records are poorly managed in tertiary hospitals, despite the value and the important roles records play in health care management⁹⁻¹⁵. As a result of poor records management practices, adequate information is not available for far reaching decision making and assessing operational activities in tertiary hospitals. Effective records management practice is essential to tertiary hospital success and would need to enjoy top management support for optimal performance. Practicing proper records management leads to effective management as tertiary hospital activities are based on access to information contained in records and competent record keeping is the key to the attainment of tertiary hospital vision and mission, quality patient care⁸. Records drive the operational activities in tertiary hospitals, however, supports from top management may significantly influence the success or otherwise, of good records management practices.

Top management support in an organisational context, refers to the active and

committed involvement of the highest levels of leadership in an organisation, initiative, or project. Top management may include the chief executives, directors, division managers among others. In tertiary hospital, by the establishing act, top management include the Chief Medical Director/Medical Director, who is the Chief Executive and Accounting Officer, the Director of Administration and the Chairman Medical Advisory Committee/Head of Clinical Services^{16,17}. This group provides the strategy and development of programmes and gaining their support will most likely make it easier to engage the best staff, acquire needed resources and give the needed supports for patients' health records management.

Strategic leadership theorists affirmed the pivotal roles of top management on organisational activities, because of the decisions they are empowered to make¹⁸. In tertiary hospital, top management supports has been recognized as one of the most important, if not the most important resources of inspiration, innovation and motivation for staff members. There is a widespread consensus that top management support is the driving force for a successful records management practices^{17,19}. The ability of tertiary hospital top management support is therefore, considered very important in order to achieve efficient patients' health records management practices²⁰⁻²³.

Researchers asserted that top management support could have a positive direct impact on every organisation's performance including tertiary hospitals^{24,25}. A Tanzanian study alluded that lack of top management supports may have significant influence on the success and failure of records management practices in organisations²⁶. Top Management support could be one of the most, if not the most important critical success factor for organisational performance.

Top management involvement in records management in tertiary hospital can positively and negatively impact the success or failure of records management practices. Thus, it is considered important for record managers to solicit the support of top management in the establishment and implementation of health records management practice programmes.

Like in every information-driven organisation, health records management practices are critical to the effective and efficient running of

activities in tertiary hospitals. Preliminary investigation has however indicated that the existing records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria are inadequate, ineffective and inefficient, despite huge volumes of records created daily. These poor records management practices may have impacted negatively on decision making, policy formulation and management’s ability to provide adequate services or protect the rights of employees in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria.

Top management supports are found to play important roles in records management practices. Likewise, records management practices depend heavily on the importance and value of the records created and the use to which such records will be put in the future. The poor records management practices in tertiary hospitals in Nigeria, especially in South-Western Nigeria, might have been as a result of lack of top management supports. It is against this background that this study examined the influence of top management supports on patients’ health records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. In the light of this, the study hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between top management support and records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria.

METHODS

The study utilized a cross-sectional descriptive design. The population of the study consisted of 493 HIM professionals responsible for managing patients’ health records in the 16 tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria and total enumeration technique was adopted. A structured self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Data collected was analysed with the aid of the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) Version 25. Results were interpreted based on the decision rule of low, moderate or high as shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Decision rule

SN	Weighted mean	Decision
1.	1.00–1.33	Low
2.	1.3 2.66	Moderate
3.	2.67 – 4.00	High
Criterion Mean =2.50		

RESULTS

A response rate of 83.5% was achieved.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The majority (73%) of records managers in South-Western Nigeria were female, 72.9% were aged between 30-49 years, with a Mean age of 38.54 years (38.54±9.03). Most of these professionals (88.4%) possess the minimum qualification of HND/BSc in Health Information Management.

Level of records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria

Table 1 with a weighted mean of 2.67 and $\delta=1.16$, indicated a high level of records creation in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. The majority of participants ($\bar{x}=3.02$) indicated that large number of records were either created or received that needs to be adequately managed. Most of the tertiary hospitals have records storage plan ($\bar{x}=2.87$) and proper maintenance of records supports prompt retrieval of records on point-of-care ($\bar{x}=2.87$). The overall result on records retention indicated a weighted mean of 2.56, which falls within moderate range. The majority of participants ($\bar{x}=2.74$) affirmed that there are procedures and guidelines for disposition of inactive records in their hospitals. Another majority (M=3.05) indicate that the hospital management ensures that qualified staff are engaged to manage patients’ health records. Conversely,

the majority ($\bar{x}=2.65$) inform that tertiary hospitals management do not see health records management practices as a priority and as such, enough resources are not committed to support effective records

management practices ($\bar{x}=2.21$). The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.6$) indicated a positive relationship between top management support and records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. This is statistically significant, evidenced by a p-value ($p = 0.000$), which is less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This implies that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between top management support and records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria, is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a relatively high level of health records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. This is evident by large volumes of records created or received daily through the uniquely allocated hospital number centrally from the number register. This is in line with Oweghoro (2019) and Oweghoro *et al.* (2023) that the unit numbering system that uniquely identifies individual records were mostly adopted by tertiary hospitals and this allows for adequate control and prevent duplication of records. The study however reveals the absence of documented policies and guidelines on record creation^{11,14}.

Findings revealed that tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria maintain large space record libraries, where physical patients' health records are properly filed on well labeled shelves, with guide cards in place to support ease of filing and reduce retrieval time. Adequate measures are also put in place to restrict unauthorized access to stored records in the library in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. This is in agreement with studies such as Tayfun (2013), Allison, (2021), Oweghoro *et al.* (2023) that regular maintenance of records minimize loss of records and prevent unauthorized access^{14,26,27}.

The level of records retention in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria is moderately high. There are specific, but undocumented rules and guidelines on records retention, inactive records are also purged from filing system on regular basis to create space for new records. This is in line with a study by Dehnavi and Shojaei (2022) that different hospital adopts different strategies and guidelines on records retention²⁸. Findings also show that the majority of tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria have no established policies, guidelines or schedule for disposing inactive records. This is supported by the findings of Oweghoro *et al.* (2023) that health records management practices in tertiary hospitals face serious challenges due to lack of conventionally documented policies, guidelines and regulations¹⁴. These hospitals however have a designated person, who decides on when and what records to be disposed.

The study reveals top management support in areas of engaging qualified staff, resource allocation, funding, regular staff training, seminars

and workshops in support of health records records management practices. This finding is in tandem with previous studies with that of Luseno, Kimuta and Nyaboga (2023), that established the significance of top management support for adequate qualified staff, allocation of adequate resources and training for skill development of staff involved in the records management practices^{23,29}. Findings however, revealed that health records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria lack adequate top management supports in term of funding and resource allocation. This finding corroborates Angelis *et al.* and Zhou *et al.* assertion that a key challenge in the healthcare systems is the scarcity of resources in the face of rising demand for services, putting their sustainability in danger³⁰.

This study reveal that top management support do relatively influenced records management practices in terms of right staffing and continuous training at tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigerian. This is in agreement with studies that established the fact that top management supports drive tertiary hospital operations, including records management practices^{24,29}.

CONCLUSION

The study established a relatively high level of health records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria. It is also evident from the findings that top management supports do significantly influenced health records management in areas of right workforce, but inadequate in terms of resource allocation in support of health records management practices. Supports from top management of hospitals should be considered as fundamental in the establishment of effective health records management practices in tertiary hospitals in South-Western Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Hospital management need to improve in the areas of resource allocation to better health records management practices in their hospitals.
2. There is need for continuing professional education to managers of the patient health records.

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