



Editorial

Electronic migration, quackery denunciation and professional regulations: the roles of health records professionals in rebuilding confidence in the Nigerian healthcare system

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As the pioneer Editor-in-Chief of this new journal – the International Journal of Health Records & Information Management (IJHRIM), the first scholarly platform for dissemination of knowledge in health records and information management in Nigeria, I welcome readers and contributors to the world of IJHRIM. Accepting this onerous task in 2015 from the regulatory agency of the Federal Government - Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN) and in 2017, from the professional body- Association of Health Records Practitioners of Nigeria (AHRPN), I was quite aware that the task is highly demanding. Nothing could I have done other than beseeching for guidance and supports. Divine intervention, then, support of all stakeholders and contributors, I sincerely sought.

With its over 50 years of existence and practice in Nigeria, from the days in the '60s and '70s, when the professionals were called medical records officers, to the days between '80s and a part of 2000s, when they were being referred to as health records officers; to the controversial era of health information managers; up till this current era of rebirthed and renewed nomenclature – health records professionals, the profession is celebrating the birth of her first and only scholarly journal – the International Journal of Health Records & Information Management¹.

The Nigerian health sector is undergoing reformation processes and all stakeholders are expected to lend support in order to reengineer the system, including the deployment of measures that

are capable of ensuring seamless health information systems^{2,3}. At the centre of this rebuilding process is the health information management profession. This is especially at a time, when the regulatory agency (HRORBN) is undergoing legislative review of its requirements/provisions and the professional body (AHRPN), strategizing politically for an improved health records services.

Taking into cognizance, the underlying principles and responsibilities of the profession in this rebuilding process, health records professionals in Nigeria are becoming more mindful than ever before, of their respective obligations and contributions toward best practices in health information management. First, they demonstrate resistance to the proliferation of unqualified personnel in their practice^{4,5}. It is a common knowledge that, to best address quackery in any profession, training, retraining, research and professionalism must be the watchwords. Indeed, these four key elements are needed to holistically address the proliferation of unqualified personnel taking the roles of health records professionals in Nigeria.

As would be seen later in this maiden issue, scholars like Nwani⁶ and Suleiman-Abdul *et al*⁷ emphasize on the importance of effective and continuing training of professionals and would-be professionals; Adeleke⁸ and Adeleke *et al*⁹ emphasize more on scientific research and Oyebanji¹⁰ promotes enforcement of standardization in health information management

practice. In today's healthcare context, we all agree that electronic health record (EHR) is pertinent to the emerging roles of health records professionals hence, Omokanye *et al.*, Maibashira and Omidoyin judiciously explore the importance of EHRs to the Nigerian healthcare systems¹¹⁻¹³. In order to carve a reliable pedestal for a seamless adoption and implementation of EHRs in Nigeria, there is no doubt the fact that the current paper-based practice must be perfected and the quality of documentation improved upon. It is in this light that Oweghoro, Adebisi *et al.* and Salman focus more on how to improve healthcare data quality¹⁴⁻¹⁶.

The Health Records Officers Registration Board of Nigeria (HRORBN), which has regulatory functions and the Association of Health Records Practitioners of Nigeria (AHRPN), which is the professional body of all trained and licensed health records professionals, established that the engagement of untrained personnel in doing the job of health records professionals was responsible for the dearth of quality healthcare data necessary for healthcare decision making in the country¹⁷⁻²⁰. The two bodies, as well as the Nigerian Minister of Health therefore advocate for professionalism, speedy and quality health records practice in Nigeria^{17,18,21,22}.

It is hoped that health records professionals in Nigeria would own up to emerging responsibilities in their practice as well as renew their efforts in turning the healthcare data that has hitherto been used only for patient care management, into a valuable research tool with a view to enhancing their acceptance of the new scholarly roles. The Government of Nigeria especially the Ministry of Health needs to enforce the deployment of only trained and licensed health records professionals into all tiers of healthcare, deploy IT hardware and software into the system and formulate policies that will ensure good health records practice in the country. Most importantly, there is need to step up and broaden the regulatory activities of the Health Records Officers' Registration Board of Nigeria from enforcement of regulations at training institutions only, to the service areas (all tiers of healthcare delivery system) with a view to entrenching best health records practices for an improved healthcare to the Nigerian populace.

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