

Research Article

PROCEDURE AND SEARCH SKILLS USED BY TRADITIONAL MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS IN RETRIEVING INFORMATION FOR TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The present research aims to identify the Procedure and Search Skills Used by Traditional Medical Practitioners in Retrieving Information for Traditional Medicine in Nigeria. The study used a purposive sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling to select participants and unstructured interview was used to collect data from the participants. The findings from the study indicated that the procedures and search skills used by the traditional medical practitioners included visiting bushes, plucking of leaves, uprooting relevant plants for their stems and roots, cutting trees, and peeling of tree skins as primary aspect of the procedure while the secondary Procedure covers washing, cleaning, drying, chopping, pounding, packaging and preserving. The skills developed and used for medical information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners included being loyal, visiting senior scholars or colleagues for explanations on issues proving difficult, there was no formal information retrieval skills developed by the practitioners. In conclusion, documenting traditional medical knowledge was considered the most important factor that would encourage patronizes to use the medicine and the ascendants' of the traditional medical practitioners to continue with the practice. It was therefore recommended that in order to improve the use of traditional medicine and its heritage there is the need for proper documentation.

Keywords: search kills, Medical Practitioners, Traditional Medicine, Information, Medicine, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Akintilo, (2000) asserts that traditional medicine is part of the people's socio-cultural milieu and that it conforms to the basic tenets of 'Primary Health Care' as advocated by the World Health Organization. Knowledge in local community is closely related to wisdom and the ultimate goal of seeking knowledge is to make one wise to acquire relevant experience on how to live profitably within the community. The process of knowledge acquisition among the local community requires one to be courageous, humble and hardworking. He must be diligent, obedient and respectful of his master and elders in the community. Knowledge acquisition in local community is targeted at preparing one to face the present and future challenges in the society. Yet, there is no curriculum as in Western knowledge system which is acquired within the confine of serene environment based on expected or predetermined outcome. In Hausa community knowledge is pursued and not acquired because one is expected to assimilate and properly blend into the culture before he can understand what he is expected to learn. Reality in traditional society is shaped by cultural practices and before one can understand the practices he must believe it and assimilate it before he can blend in the culture. Traditional practices in communities according to Madauchi, et al. (2008) include trades and crafts such as blacksmith and iron smelting, building, butchery, farming and hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, medical practices and many other professions. The various societies that make up the Nigerian included have for long relied on the indigenous health system which was developed as a response to their environment and it involved the use of locally available resources to prevent and cure diseases. It is a natural health care system which many generations of Nigerians have used. The practice transcends the maintenance of good health of the people as it also protects them from the menace of wild animals, evil

spirits, accidents, provide bountiful harvest, good luck and other human activities Roan,(1999) . Nigerians therefore, have a deep belief and reliance on traditional medicine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Medical Practice in Nigeria

Nigerians have a deep belief and reliance on the services of the traditional practitioners for their health care needs. An estimated 75 percent of the population still prefers to solve their health problems by consulting the traditional healers (Adam, 2008), Nigerian Tribune, (March 2008). Oluwo, (2004) posits that traditional medical practitioners acquire herbal knowledge either through inheritance or apprenticeship as a call bygone or the other. In the past, many of them practiced the art as a hobby or as a form of community service with little or no financial rewards thus making the practice "pure and efficacious". Traditional medical practice system is well structured and organized and has survived through generations to maintain harmony between body, mind and soul within its socio-cultural and religious context. The various ethnic groups in Nigeria have different traditional healthcare practitioners aside their western health care counterparts. The Yoruba call them 'Babalawo', the Igbo call them 'Dibia', while the Hausa refer to them as 'Boka'. However, different experts have emerged within their ranks including herbalists, bone-setters, psychiatrics, and birth attendants, among several others. They usually rely on vegetables, mineral substances, animal parts and certain other methods such as prayers, divinations and incantations Oluwo and Jerome,(2004). Traditional medicine has impacted significantly on the lives of the people especially in the rural areas where access to orthodox Medicare is minimal. Aside the lack of access, the prohibitive cost of western medications makes traditional medicine attractive. Traditional medical practice, despite of its popularity has been challenged on many grounds. One of such is that its popularity is based on the anecdotal experiences of patients. Osborne, (2007), notes that the practitioners inflate the claims

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attached to advertisement and its products as well as not having scientific data about its effectiveness, thus making it difficult to ascertain legitimate and effective therapy and therapist. Some of the other arguments against traditional medicine

- that traditional medical practitioners lack the skills required for correct diagnosis of serious disorders,
- that they are always unwilling to accept the limitations of their knowledge, skills and medicines particularly in complicated organic disorders,
- that traditional medicine lacks standard dosage and has not been subjected to scientific verifications,
- that even though the educated are convinced that the healers have supernatural knowledge and that this knowledge is medically useful, they have found them to be unscrupulous and dubious, and
- That the healers lack the equipments required to conduct physical examinations.

In a similar vein, a former Director-General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) expressed the challenges being faced in regulating traditional medicines (The Nation August, 28, 2008 p. 44). These include, lack of documentation, inadequate coordination of the practitioners' activities, poor communication between the practitioners and their patients, secrecy of actual contents and/or difficulty in determining actual ingredients. Furthermore, most of the claims of the traditional practitioners are said to be unsubstantiated and their post market monitoring have been difficult. Patients are also said to have reported adverse reactions. (Akinleye, 2008), corroborated this when he identifies some of the drawbacks of traditional medicine as incorrect diagnosis, imprecise dosage, low hygiene standards, the secrecy of some healing methods and the absence of written records about the patients.

Importance of Traditional Medicine to the Local Communities

Traditional medicine is not only a vital source of health care, but also an important source of income for many communities. Traditional medicine may even form an integral part of a community's identity. Pre-industrial communities have been responsible for the discovery of most of the medicinal plants in use today, and many communities are still involved in the wild collection, domestication, cultivation and management of medicinal plant resources. (Abbot, 2014). This economic activity supports many people as well as indigenous and local communities, a benefit that in turn provides incentives for the conservation of Traditional Medicine. While some medicinal plants are cultivated commercially, most continue to be collected from the wild. In Nigeria there are many tribes and traditional knowledge systems. Each of the different tribe maintained separate identity, beliefs, values, and practices. According to (Mlambo, 2007) culture plays important role in the historical evolution of man and in the formation of societies. It helps the individual to claim his identity by allowing him to trace the different communities in which his history evolves. It also allows him to understand the history of all that is true, good and beautiful. It means that culture contributes to the development of knowledge and in the development of human society. However, modernization is eating into most of indigenous values including the values in traditional knowledge in medical practices. The effects of modernization on traditional values include among others lost of indigenous knowledge. The International Council for Science - ICSU (2002) declared in a report that traditional knowledge is useful in sustainable development. The declaration observed that "traditional knowledge is dynamic expressions of perceiving and understanding the world." It represents the needs of local communities and serves

as good source of information on indigenous cultures. However, before traditional medical knowledge can be understood, accessed and use, it has to be harnessed through documentation with the view to organize, preserve, protect and promote access or use of the knowledge in the society. Kabudi quoted in, (Mpofu and Miruka, 2009) posited that history has identified the survival of civilizations rooted on knowledge and skills exchanges among its people to facilitate the continuity of its legacy. Where there is no proper channels of passing on knowledge to upcoming generations, traditions of the group may be lost. Thus, access to information on traditional medical knowledge can bring positive change in a community by stimulating economic opportunities and other opportunities. Traditional medical knowledge contains many understandings which can be shared to other Indigenous group to improve their living conditions. Before this can be achieved the practices in traditional knowledge in medical practices need to be documented and organized. Due to the important role of traditional knowledge in development, there are global initiatives among many countries to integrate traditional Knowledge in development. Science and Development (2005) reported that, people are becoming more aware of the value of Indigenous knowledge particularly its potential contribution to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. However, it noted that traditional knowledge is in danger of disappearing not only as the result of the influence of globalization, but also due to the rapid changes in technology for processing and handling information in the society. There is also lack of facilities for executing the process of documentation including capturing, assessment, validation, protection and dissemination of such knowledge in developing countries. This means that there is dearth of facilities required in management of traditional knowledge. Information on traditional knowledge provides the strategies for problem-solving among local communities and helps to shape local visions and perceptions of environment and society in which traditional medical knowledge is included. Typical examples of information on traditional knowledge in medical practices that should be made available should include information on:

- Midwives and herbal medicine.
- Local healers/traditional medicine
- Rituals, initiation, and storytelling in West Africa.
- Food and agriculture,
- Animal husbandry and ethnic veterinary medicine,
- Use and management of natural resources
- Primary health care (PHC), preventive medicine and psycho-social care
- Community development
- Poverty alleviation

The collection must reflect what the community considered of value to them. Further, (Stevens, 2008) added that projects to make available information on traditional medical knowledge must be targeted at serving immediate benefits of the communities because it is only through this effort that information professionals can play an important role in assisting with the management of traditional knowledge.

Research Questions

1. What are the resources used for the preparation of traditional medicine by the practitioners in Nigeria?
2. What are the procedures and search skills used by traditional medical practitioners in preparing traditional medicine?
3. What are the skills developed and used for medical information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners?

Objectives of the study

1. Find out the resources used for the preparation of traditional medicine by the practitioners in Nigeria.
2. Determine the search skills and procedures used by the traditional medical practitioners in preparing traditional medicine.
3. Find out the skills developed and used for medical information retrieval by the traditional medical practitioners.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted qualitative research methodology; the purpose of this study is to explore Procedure and Search Skills Used by Traditional Medical Practitioners in Retrieving Information for Traditional Medicine in Nigeria. The researcher chooses qualitative research as a paradigm that would facilitate this purpose. Qualitative method is ideal because it is effective in the study of behavior and behavior changes. It aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2002).

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all the traditional medical practitioners in Nigeria with a specific reference to Katsina State. The total number of the registered traditional medical practitioners in Katsina State is 50 as sampled for the purpose of the research.

Results And Discussion Of Findings

Procedures and Techniques of Preparing Traditional Medicine

This category provides explanations quotes from the participants' responses on the procedure use in preparing traditional medicine by medical practitioners. It was generated from two sub-categories showing narratives about the ways traditional medicine are organized.

1. Experimentation and intellectual skill.
2. Training on ethics and knowledge sharing

Experimentation and intellectual skills

This sub-category contains description about the ways in which medical practitioner's prepared traditional medicine as mentioned by the following respondents: "We do conduct research in great detail to ascertain which concoction or medicine will best cure a disease, we also experiment what our predecessors had published and established". the respondents further said "we also read about 'dubbin naboyi' (medicine taught by prophet and messenger of Allah (SWT) Muhammad (SAW)) and learn more about what we practice." Another respondent voiced that: "We also used to consult Islamic documented source of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on Islamic herbs for cure of diseases" Moreover, other respondents indicated that "we use to spend two weeks in the bush looking for these herbs and root". Similarly, some respondents explicated that "we send people (our family and relatives) to bush to pluck the herbs and root. I tell them their names, when they return I dry the ones that require drying and reserve others as primary aspects, while the secondary aspects cover washing, cleaning, drying, chopping, pounding, burning, cooking, packaging and preserving".

Training on Ethics and Knowledge Sharing

According to responses from traditional medical practitioners, they were attend workshops /seminars to learn new ways or how to prepare traditional medicine as explained by the following respondent: we usually attended national workshop of traditional medical practitioners and we discussed about working harder at administering medicine on deadly disease" Another interviewee ascertained that "i was even honoured in one of the gatherings". Other respondent's interviewee ascertained that: "there is knowledge sharing from our elders (parents) they taught us about the way or how to prepare traditional medicine, so we use to share that knowledge among us" additionally, this respondent explained that: "there is knowledge sharing we receive from our senior scholars in which we have learnt about Jinns livelihood we have learnt that Jinn is conceived and delivered within eight (8) hours and spends two hundred (200) years suckling. The short lived ones spent ten thousand (10,000) years".

Information Retrieval Skills

This category provides explanations on skills developed and used for medical information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners. It is divided into two main sub-categories: (1) Visiting senior scholars. (2) Spiritual and Divine Revelation.

Visiting Senior Scholars

This sub-category provides responses on Medical Information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners. Most of the respondents believed in retrieving information from their senior colleagues as expressed by these respondents: "to discover new knowledge, we visit our senior scholars and ask them questions". Other explained that: "we usually visited our senior once to acquire current issue or information and observe the results...the respondents further said by so doing we affirm potency of medicines or concoctions". Another respondent voiced that: "to increase understanding and expertise of the traditional medical business and acquaintance and knowledge sharing is based on experience we are getting from our senior scholars"

Spiritual and Divine Revelation

This sub-category contains narratives revealing on information retrieval skills by traditional medical practitioners, as disclosed by these respondents: "In the night it will come (spiritual) to me different knowledge of herbs and roots for treating that and this diseases. Sometimes it will come to me in my dreams whereby I will simply find myself engulfed in traditional medical discussions with some unknown individuals "Another respondent further said: "Since when I started this practice no individual has come to instruct me about root and herbs. It is only Allah who reveals such mercy to me. I don't practice voodoo. I inherited this practice from my father. I spent several years without being able to write down 'bismillah' but when the inspiration came I started writing in Arabic without difficulty."

Procedures and Search skills used by Traditional Medical Practitioners in Preparing Traditional Medicine

Finding from this study indicated that, experimentation, intellectual skill, training on ethics and knowledge sharing are the procedures and search skills used by the traditional medical practitioners in preparing traditional medicine in the local government area. Findings also revealed that traditional medical practitioners conduct research in great detail to ascertain which concoction or medicine will best cure

a disease, they experiment what their predecessors had published and established, they also read about 'dubbin naboyi' (medicine taught by prophet and messenger of Allah (SWT) Muhammad (SAW)) and learn more about what they practice. Following the procedures, findings from the study also indicated that traditional medical practitioners in this study visiting bushes, plucking of leaves, uprooting relevant plants for their stems and roots, cutting trees, and peeling of tree skins as primary aspect of the procedure while the secondary aspect covers washing, cleaning, drying, chopping, pounding, packaging and preserving. Others procedure included cooking and burning. They also explained how to do concoction for ulcer, stomach ached, miscarriage sickness, female Infertility, stomach aches, pile disease, ulcer sickness, hiccup, tooth Ache, diabetes, hepatitis B, children skin disease (ela)", Malaria, Headache, Gout, pile. Further investigation carried out in this study shown that traditional medical practitioners spend about two weeks in the bush looking for herbs and root. When they return from bush, they dry the ones that require drying using net to cover them so that spider and other insects will not infest them and keep the ones that don't require drying in separate rooms. It was also found out that; they don't dry them in the sun because it reduces the potent of the herbs. Result from this study also indicated that sometimes they will receive spiritual revelation in the dreams whereby they will simply find themselves engaged in traditional medical discussions with some unknown individuals, they practical's what they discussed with them and it will yield good result. However, one respondent believed that his own search skill was divine. It is a belief that a source of inspiration was from the creator. In the earlier discussions, the researcher reported that some respondents revealed how they received instructions from Jinns on how to cure diseases or ailment, divine inspiration is exceptional because the source is Godly. Moving away from divine inspiration the last respondent said his own search skill was by learning and utilizing hereditary skills from his parents. He emphasize the importance of continuous learning in traditional medicine because most of the knowledge and skills about the practice is not documented. Therefore learning plays a role in ensuring that knowledge is not lost due to redundancy or other reasons. Additionally, further investigation in this study also indicated that, traditional medical practitioners used to attend national workshops of traditional medical practitioners in some of the Local Government in Katsina state where they discussed and share knowledge and experiences about administering medicine on deadly disease. Through this they they gain alot from their senior scholars.

Skills Developed and Used for Medical Information Retrieval by Traditional Medical Practitioners

Since the 1940s the problem of information storage and retrieval has attracted increasing attention. We have vast amounts of information such that accurate and speedy access is becoming ever more difficult (Van Rijsbergen, 2009). Medical Information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners requires a number of skills depending on situation and context. Findings from this study also indicated that, the skills developed and used for medical information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners include being loyal, spiritual and divine revelation visiting senior scholars or colleagues for explanations on issues proved to be difficult. Additionally, apart from visiting senior scholars or colleagues, findings in this study also indicated that, spiritual and divine revelations also were part of the information retrieval skills found in this study. Spiritually, in the night in their dreams they got different knowledge of herbs and roots for treating many diseases. Sometimes it will come in their dreams whereby they will simply find themselves engaged in traditional medical discussions with some unknown individuals. Findings further exposed that, they don't practice voodoo; they inherited this practice

from their parents. It was also discovered that, there was no formal documented traditional medical information source developed by the practitioners for easy retrieval of traditional medical information in the study area.

Findings of the study

1. That the procedures and search skills used by the traditional medical practitioners in Matazu Local Government Area are the same which included visiting bushes, plucking of leaves, uprooting relevant plants for their stems and roots, cutting trees, and peeling of tree skins as primary aspect of the procedure; while the secondary one covers washing, cleaning, drying, chopping, pounding, packaging and preserving. Others included cooking and burning. However, one respondent believed that her own search skill is divine.
2. That the skills developed and used for medical information retrieval by traditional medical practitioners in the Area included loyalty, visiting senior scholars or colleagues for explanations on issues proving difficult, there was no formal information retrieval skills developed by the practitioners.

Conclusion

The research work on exploring the procedure and search skills used by traditional medical practitioners in retrieving information for traditional medicine in Nigeria, it was concluded that participants are willing to publish their methods of concoction for the treatment of entire diseases as well as prescriptions and dosages so that people will benefit. It was also revealed there are no formal search skills on retrieving information. Finally, for the successful documentation of traditional medical practices in Nigeria particularly in Katsina State needs to pay attention to the concerns raised by participants in using new technological tools for retrieving and searching information.

Recommendations

1. There is the need for the Traditional Medical Practitioner to focus on specific area of specialization for proper diagnosis and medication. This will help the practitioners to evenly grow in their practices in terms of learning how things are newly done which could only be achieved by focusing on specific area.
2. There is the need for the traditional medical practitioners to adopt scientific investigation or laboratory experiments to uncover their medicinal materials for the safety of the consumers. Governments have a responsibility for the health of their people and should strive to enforce national policies, regulations, and standards as part of comprehensive national health systems to ensure appropriate, safe and effective use of traditional medicine.
3. Regular training, seminars and workshops should be organized by the traditional medical practitioners association and made mandatory to every member this will enable them to learn new procedures for preparing the traditional medicine and also serve as the medium of sharing knowledge/ ideas and experiences among themselves. The knowledge of traditional medicine, treatments and practices should be respected, preserved, promoted and communicated widely and appropriately.
4. There is the need for formal documented source of traditional medical information in which the members in need of traditional medical information could quickly use when the need arise, more so, modern tools such GSM hand set, CD and Audio/Video recorder should be employed in recording

Information on all Traditional Medical Practices in order to provide access to the knowledge from variety of media. Traditional Medical Practitioners should have non-economic motivations for disseminating information, communication between conventional and traditional medicine providers should be strengthened and appropriate training programmes be established , it will serve as their medical information retrieval channel.

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