

Service Excellence: A Challenge for Nurses

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Abstract: *This paper examined the challenges of nursing education and practice and ways of surmounting them in order to guarantee service excellence. Some factors militating against service excellence in nursing were identified to include technological explosion, globalization, consumer education, cost of health and changing demographics as well as increasing diversity among others. A major contemporary challenge in nursing practice was identified as the migration from the analogue system to digital mode of health care services promoted by the revolutionary changes in the information, communication technology advancement worldwide. This article also advocates the need for a career structure that will enable nurses' progress to the peak (pinnacle) of their career and remain in clinical practice to enhance service excellence. To achieve this, it was recommended that nurses must commit themselves with issues of education, research and practice in order to remain relevant in a changing world. Furthermore, to meet up with advancement in digital age emphasis must be on computer literacy by all nurses.*

Key words: *Service excellence, nursing, technological explosion, challenges*

I. Introduction

Nursing is both an **art** and a **science**. The **service** in caring for patients is the art and the **competence** (skill, knowledge and attitude) in providing quality care is the science. Nutt (2009) observed that the changing demands in health care have resulted in a significant demand for Nurses who have advanced knowledge and clinical expertise in assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and health care management. The nurses provide wide-ranging and constant care to patients in a variety of health institutions.

Nurses are committed to excellence in meeting a quality standard of care. Globally, Nurses are being accepted and respected as essential healthcare providers. The global concern for health promotion and disease prevention, will in the coming years, recognize Nurses as valuable and essential asset for the entire health community.

The hospital has always been a very complex organization requiring the skills and expertise of various groups of professionals and non-professionals to enable it carry out its goals and objectives (Bankole, 2008). These include delivery of highly personalized and quality care to clients and a responsibility on the hospital to ensure:

- Maintenance and survival of the hospital
- Hospital stability
- Growth
- Financial solvency
- Nursing and Medical education and research

However, there are many challenges facing the Nurses in the delivery of quality care to the clients. Therefore, this paper looks at service excellence as a challenge for Nurses.

II. Service Performance

There has been a substantial investment in holding health care providers accountable for the quality of care provided in hospitals and other settings of care (Kurtzman, Dawson and Johnson, 2008). This investment has been realized through the proliferation of national policies. In Nigeria **SERVICOM** policy is government's effort at instilling quality into government services (Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009). The term servicom is an acronym for "service compact with all Nigerians". The initiative was necessitated by the need to eradicate inefficiency and corruption from Nigerian civil service and incorporate quality into government services. Oluboyede (2006) concluded that the ultimate objective of the on-going health services reform in Nigeria is to provide good health care delivery to the patients.

Operational excellence, care quality, and financial performance are increasingly linked as key determinants of hospital performance. The hospital environment may be seen as a challenge, but it is also an excellent opportunity for Nursing services to further demonstrate their value in patient care outcomes and support financial performance. Hines and Yu (2009) contended that Nursing contributions towards reduced complications, reductions in length of stay and lower costs per case should be measured, rewarded and made transparent to the public.

However, Nurses should not view quality as simply another task on which to focus their attention, but rather a continuous process that requires critical thinking about how care is delivered and its effect on the entire care progression of a patient.

Nursing management must focus on continually educating their staff on appropriate care, as well as developing and supporting a culture of safety and accountability. Nursing leadership must improve Nurse retention and recruiting efforts, encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and, most importantly, demonstrate to the rest of the organization the value Nursing brings to the organization through consistently tracking quality and financial indicators and tying them to Nursing initiatives.

III. Challenges To Nurses And Nursing Profession

Akinwumi (1992) noted that Nurses constitute the single largest group among health personnel in most countries in the world and it is upon them that a greater burden of the delivery of the health services often rest. Nurses have been caring for the sick persons who had presented themselves to the care delivery centre and the contact had usually been terminated when the client has been discharged as cured and requiring no more care. The community health services had been without variation, but the Nurses role had been limited to specific groups with emphasis on mothers and children for instance.

With change in the world health order and emergence of new concepts of health, emphasis of health care delivery began to shift from hospital-based curative care services to preventive, promotive, and rehabilitative health services and the need to extend health services to benefit not only people located in urban and semi-urban areas but to all communities in our societies. Nurses are now being called upon to meet new demands on the health care delivery systems of individuals, families and groups within the community. It is also expected that Nurses work in collaboration with other members of the health team, including the traditional health care providers – birth attendants and herbalists, members of the community and other sectors in the society concerned with social-economic development in the community.

According to Ehiemere (2009), in recent times the field of Nursing has felt the influences of major social, political, economic and technological changes occurring all over the globe popularly referred to as globalization. Ehiemere (2009), noted that the determinants of health, disease, and quality of life in today's world are tied to the globalization process. Nursing has responded to these changes by effecting reforms in delivery. For example, there are changes in the community oriented care with more emphasis on preventive care than hospital-based care (i.e it is more of "health" model than "disease" model).

John (2009) said the following factors can make or mar service excellence:

- Lack of equipment and materials to work with
- Poor attitude of Nurses
- Non-appreciation of Nurses by the public
- Inadequate educational preparation of the Nurse
- Lack of patronage of services in public hospitals by those in authority
- Inadequate supervision of Nurse-trainees in the clinical areas.

Ehiemere (2009) contended that modern technology, advances in communication and information, changes in social consciousness and the reassessment of the quality and type of health care have placed new and increased demands on the Nurse and Nursing profession. Therefore, Nurses and Nursing profession must confront issues of education, research and practice with commitment and focus in order to remain relevant in our dynamic society where changes is the only constant thing. So the challenges of service excellence for Nurses and Nursing profession are as in the following:

IV. Challenges In Nursing Education

There are challenges and opportunities available to the Nursing profession, particularly those academic institutions responsible for preparing and producing the next generation of Nurses. So Nurses must position themselves through liberal education in order to meet these emerging challenges and transformations for today and the future of the profession (Ehiemere, 2009). There are ten (10) current trends to watch as identified by Barbara, Oros and Durney-Crowley (2004) on Nursing education:

a. Changing demographics and increasing diversity

With advancement in public health and clinical care, the average life span is increasing rapidly resulting in old population with the challenges of chronic and degenerative diseases which places burden on health system. Unmanageable urbanization causes public health breakdown – spread of HIV/AIDS, other “New plaques” and antibiotic resistant diseases among others. In Nigeria, 47% of the population is below 18 years while only 4% is above 60 years. The estimated average life expectancy is 52 years which is on the decrease because of increase in poverty level (Population Fact Sheet 57). The demographics of Nursing students have changed with more young people from secondary schools in Nigeria entering the universities to read Nursing sciences. This category of students brings in their own peculiarities and challenges. On the other hand more males enter the universities and are being exposed to both Nursing and Midwifery learning experiences. These changing demographics must be embraced and responded to.

b. Technological explosion

Growth in information technology has an impact on the education of nurses and the health care delivery. This has challenges in the following areas.

- Electronic medical record is gradually replacing the traditional documentation system.
- Through the internet, consumers are getting information previously available only to clinicians
- Electronic commerce will soon become routine for transacting health care services.
- Distance learning students and faculties are now linked from different locations and expand the potential for accessing continuing professional education.
- Pre-clinical simulation laboratories are available to stimulate critical thinking and skill acquisition in a safe and user-friendly environment.

Other nursing education challenges are:

- Budget-constrained government are less committed to supporting nursing education
- Inflexible Nursing programmes are out of touch with service needs and increasingly irrelevant to nursing practice.

For nurses to remain relevant in this new millennium they need to be skilled in the use of information technology. Emphasis must be on computer literacy by making it a core course in our institutions and a prerequisite for recruitment.

c. Globalization of world’s economy and society

Numerous factors are responsible, including advances in information technology and communication, international travel commerce, the growth of multinational corporations, political changes in Africa and Asia, etc. The world became a “global village” and there are both risk and benefits to that development. There are rapid disease transmission and also improvement in health care delivery due to rapid knowledge transfer. Nurses are faced with the challenge of emerging and re-emerging infections that result from globalization and the cost of health services. Nursing education and research must become more focused.

d. Consumer education

Today’s health care client is a well informed consumer who expects to participate in decisions affecting personal and family health care. So Nurses must be educated to meet these challenges, particularly in the areas of alternative therapies, genomics and palliative care.

e. Shift to population-based care and the increasing complexity of patient care

The community has become the setting for disease prevention, health promotion and maintenance as well as for chronic disease prevention. Providing services for defined populations demand skills and knowledge in clinical epidemiology, biostatistics and behavioural science. Nurses are expected to exhibit management skills at both organizational and patient care levels. These new trends should be incorporated into the nursing curriculum.

f. The cost of health care and the challenge of managed care

Concerns about financial pressures to limit costs of health care have led to restructuring of health care (e.g. managed care) with Nurses increasingly recognized as full partners in cost-effective health care delivery. Nursing education programmes must prepare student Nurses for roles in case management as well as employment in the managed care environment (Ehiemere, 2009).

g. Impact of health policy and regulation

Nurses must be prepared to effectively participate and contribute in the political process of the nation so as to influence policies for better health care delivery. This is important in view of the fact that there is lack of patronage of services in public hospitals by those in authority (John, 2007) who are less committed in the formulation of policies for better health care delivery.

h. The growing need for interdisciplinary education for collaborative practice.

Nursing is fully integrated into interdisciplinary health teams that incorporate opportunities for interdisciplinary education and collaborative practice to effectively and efficiently manage the comprehensive needs of clients and populations.

i. Nursing shortage /opportunities to lifelong learning and workforce development

The shortage of Nurses at the bedside with downsizing of Nursing profession have a negative impact on health care delivery. Nurses are stressed, working with declining resources in settings where they often feel in competition with other health care providers. Strikes and unrest over salary and working conditions are common. Nursing institutions need to partner with the health care industry for critical thinking and lifelong learning among members to develop and address Nursing shortages. Nurse entrepreneurship need to be emphasized in all institutions that prepare Nurses for self reliance.

j. Significant advances in nursing science and research

The advances in nursing science and research has pose challenges to nursing education because of the emphasis on technological nursing care, the effect of such care and ways to combine technology with human care. Our institutions of learning are not properly equipped and focused on the science of nursing and research. Nurses prepared at doctoral levels are needed to fill this gap.

V. Challenges In Nursing Research

Nursing research focuses increasingly on the promotion of excellence in Nursing science. This will greatly help to explicate Nursing's contributions. The trends in Nursing research as identified by Polit and Beck (2006) are:

- Focus on Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) with emphasis on evidence based patient care.
- Multiple confirmatory strategies through deliberate replication of research studies with different clients, in different clinical settings and at different times to ensure that findings are adequate and consistent.
- There is increased intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration of Nurses which enable Nurse researchers play more prominent roles in health care delivery.
- Nurse researchers market themselves and their researches so as to support Nursing research.

VI. Challenges In Nursing Practice

The basic value of Nursing that has persisted over the years is service to the society (Ehiemere, 2009) and Nurses are/remain the entry point into the health care system. The progression from a novice to expert Nurse depends on the ability to learn from experience and to apply the knowledge when faced with a similar situation. Ang (2002) observed that although trial and error is one way of learning, this is impractical and unsafe in Nursing practice. Mentoring by expert Nurses is the preferred mode of learning. Unfortunately, the number of expert Nurses is still small. Another challenge is good clinical Nurses when promoted to become managers they move further away from direct patient care. It is ironical that in a clinical profession like Nursing, there was no attempt to retain the good clinical Nurses in direct patient care. A career structure for Nurses to progress and remain in clinical practice is advisable.

However, lack of equipment and material to work with and poor attitude of Nurses (John, 2007) affects health care delivery of the client whose expectations, according to Wolff, Weitzel and Fuerst (1979) are professional competence, cheerfulness, empathy, non-judgmental or punitive behaviour, assisting in meeting hygiene needs and partnering of client with the Nurse to plan care, among others. This depicts great challenges to the Nurses which are not insurmountable.

VII. Conclusion

The challenges of service excellence for Nurses are quick, effective and economical provision of services to people. The marked and increased uses of technology in Nursing and health care services have revolutionized Nursing care both positively and negatively. More money goes to high tech and high tech drives out high touch. But Nurses humanize the use of technology, never forgetting the importance of personal caring and touch. In order to meet the challenges of service delivery, our diverse multidisciplinary resources and assets in the health care field as well as competence (skill, knowledge and attitude) of both the Nurses and other health care professionals must be fully utilized.

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