

# The New Role of Medical Librarian in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Age

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**Abstract**—The study attempts to discuss the new role of medical librarian in the ICT age. It examines the traditional roles of medical librarian and the new roles brought about by the emergency of ICTs. Meaning, types and benefits of ICTs application to medical library services were highlighted, while the new role brought about by the application of ICTs were also discussed. Areas where and how ICTs can be applied to deliver library services were also mentioned. The paper concludes with how education and returning of medical librarians could enhance optimal delivery of library services and useful recommendations.

**Keywords:** Medical Librarian, ICT, Client, Para-Professionals

## I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of information communication technology has altered traditional librarianship and consequent on this, the roles of medical librarian. Prior to the advent of ICT, academic libraries were the sole custodians of information which was mostly in print (Annunobi, 2008). Medical library by definition is an institution that acquires, organizes and preserves recorded knowledge and making it available for medical clients (whoever in need of medical information). A medical librarian on the other hand is a professional who holds a bachelor degree in medical information. A medical Librarian on the other hand is a professional who holds a bachelor degree in a medical related course and a master degree in library or library and information science from a recognized University. According to Fytoon Rowland (1998), librarians have traditionally been concerned with certain functions which are collection development and acquisition, cataloguing and classification, circulation, reference work, preservation, conservation, archiving and users education. Aina (2004) itemized the following as the role of librarian and by application medical librarians as lending services, interlibrary loan services, document delivery, preservation services, provision of seating and study facilities, reference services, current awareness service exhibition and displays, library publications, users education, information literacy programme, literature search, selective dissemination of information, referral service, translation service, extension and outreach services and rental of premises. These myriads of roles were the sole responsibility of medical librarians. The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTS) and their wide applications in library services have however, tended to change

the odd order, yielding a new library work climate (Nwalo, 2007). It is therefore needful for this paper to address the following issues which are: what are the traditional roles of medical librarian, what impacts has ICT brought to medical library due to its application in delivery medical library services and what implications on medical librarian education and retraining.

## II. TRADITIONAL ROLES OF MEDICAL LIBRARIAN

The advent of ICT has completely changed the traditional roles of medical librarian. Before the advent of ICT, print documents were the sole information materials available for use in the libraries. Masys (2005) was of the opinion that the internet brings access and communication on an unprecedented scale. We are in the era of information explosion. There is therefore the need for a new method of sourcing, processing and storing the information available for medical library users.

Information and Communication Technology is a broad term used to describe any communication device or application, encompassing radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardwares and software's satellites systems and so on. The idea of ICT revolves on how information and communication are manipulated or handled. Norton (1991) defines ICT as the mechanism to process, store and transmit information which can be numeric, text or graphic form. The tradition of role of medical librarian ranges from sourcing, acquiring, processing and making information available to medical clients/patrons manually. Anuobi (2004) asserted that the requisite traditional operational and service skills without which librarian (Medical Librarian inclusive) were termed inefficient included:

- Management Skills: Personnel, Finance/Budgeting public relation and other administrative skills.
- Collecting Development Skills: identifying new publication, refreshing of library stock through evaluation and weeding judicious solution of new materials, budgeting and accountability;
- public service skills: good rapport, communication, users profile request analysis, time consciousness, knowledge of library stock, speed and accuracy.

- Technical Skills: knowledge of classification scheme, patrons areas of interest and specialization, filling and library.

Though traditional library services provided a soft platform for information communication technology to function, it is not without shortcomings. Among these are:

- slow pace of provision of library services to users
- it is time consuming
- library services take place only during the working hours.
- patrons have to come to library before they can access information.
- no access to information outside the library premises
- storage of books demands that enough space is needed from time to time.

### III. IMPACT OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE NEW ROLE OF MEDICAL LIBRARIAN

The internet is an offshoot of ICT now a household word among the elites in Nigeria. Almost everybody needs the internet for one thing or the other (Anyakoha, 2005). The proliferation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has changed in recent times library services and medical librarian roles. The following are the ICTs facilities that can be used to enhance service delivery in the medical libraries: computer systems, scanners, telephone, photocopier, magnetic tape, bar code reader, audiovisual, E-book/journals, internet connectivity CD/DVD Rom, Email, Printer, SmartCard digital camera etc. ICT can be applied to every section of the medical library for example in the cataloguing and classification, ICT has imparted on a number of ways. Yusuf (2009), opined that computers have affected the way cataloguing is being done and by whom. He stressed that though cataloguing is the sole responsibility of professional librarian in most libraries now para-professionals usually called library officers are involved. ICT has helped in resource sharing in the area of sharing catalogue data. Cataloguers are moving into new roles as they attempt providing enhanced access to new resources (Jacintha, 2012). According to Him online cataloguing is another major change that ICT has brought to cataloguing. Online cataloguing is method where you locate and copy catalogue data on-line through international computer networks. Zaid (2008) in Adeleke, 2013 opined that for cataloguers and classifier that have embraced the new technology it is no longer common to see newly acquired information resources heldup in the cataloguing unit for months. According to him the "blacklog syndrome" is fast-dying in most Nigeria libraries particularly for those whose have gained access to online catalogue.

In the circulation section, application of ICTs is also evident, computer can be used to perform same library operations such as

- Taking patrons (library users) and staff biodata
- charging and discharging
- Statistics of patron, book borrowed, book returned, books not returned, patrons eligible for fine.
- In a computerized library users can check whether the book they need is available in the library.
- Photo camera can be strategically located in the library to monitor the security of library materials.

The application of ICT has also extended its tentacle to serials management. Serials according to Montagne (1977) are any publication issued in successive parts appearing at regular or irregular intervals but as a rule intended to be continued indefinitely. Serials include journals, memoirs, annuals monographs, magazines, newspaper etc. It may be in print or electronic book format. The advent of ICT has opened the way for library services to use ICT facilities acquiring, processing and dissemination of information. Online public access catalogue (OPAC) is now the practice of many libraries while some are still loyal to the traditional cataloguing and classification of serials.

The following are the areas where ICT can be applied to serials management

- **acquisition:** ICT can be used to inquire, received receipt, payment of invoices, claiming part not received and close liaison with suppliers, alerting for new journals from vendor.
- ICT can be used to download bibliographic information of serial from online databases.
- ICT (computer) can be used to take statistics of serials users and even used to generate reports.

### IV. IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF MEDICAL LIBRARIAN

The new work climate due to offshoot of ICT calls for improved methods of medical library services delivery. The integration of ICTs in medical library operations demand that medical librarians need special skills in ICTs to effectively serve their patrons. Chiware (2007) observed that the skills in e-resources management, e-services development, full-text digitization and teaching skills are lacking in many libraries. There is therefore the need for training of medical librarian in using ICT to build digital collection development, use computer to perform library operations, various software packages in web publishing, digitizing of library resources, identifying vendors, conversion process, networking and using technology to store information. Walton and Edwards (1999) observed that there is a significant management skills gap

amongst information professionals in Nigeria. He therefore suggested a collaborated and strategic management of resources as a way of alleviating problems. Staff training and retraining becomes very important so that the vast available quantity of electronic information resources for medical library clients will not be under used (Goulding et al., 2000).

Training is the act of or process of teaching or learning a skill or discipline (Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1995). The importance of training cannot be overemphasized. According to Sewdass (2003), training helps

- employees to learn their jobs quickly and effectively thereby limiting the cost involved in learning.
- It also assists existing staff to improve their work performance and to keep up to date in their fields of specialization. For training of medical librarian to bring out the desired result, it should be a continuous exercise.

According to Akintunde, 2007, the following areas need Technical Services Budget in the library include:

- staff development
- project management
- software
- hardware
- conversion of manual record into machine-readable form
- licensing, access and subscriptions
- internet access
- appropriate library environment
- operational budget

He emphasized that for library to provide effective technical services in area of ICTS, then staff development must receive very high priority. This includes:

- Continuous professional development
- Basic computer literacy
- Training on the use of specific and relevant ICT in order to have these realized, adequate budget must be provided for. According to him, the budget would include such item as:
- cost of tuition
- transportation
- daily allowance

Where the training is done outside the library, budget should be provided for

- training venue rentage

- cost of digital projector
- resource person
- training manuals
- refreshments and meals

He concluded that the budget provision and training of librarian should be yearly if the library is to be at the cutting edge of technology, efficient and effective in service deliver. Otherwise, the library would have expended so much on ICT's without competent librarian to manipulate the systems.

The training programmes that can be organized for medical librarian include: in-house training, sending them to workshops, short courses, placement in other libraries and on-site visits by experts, formal training in library and information science and computer science programmes.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

For quality library services medical librarians should give priority to application of information technology if they are to efficiently perform the role of information provider to library users. This is because ICT has changed the traditional librarianship. The increased numbers of medical library users, high demand for medical information materials, increase in quantity of medical information published and new electronic formats and resources are among other reasons why medical librarians should embrace ICT. However, the willingness of the medical librarian should be accompanied with the readiness of university community in terms of budgetary provision. The Federal, State and the University community should put standard policies in place to automate medical libraries. Continuous training and retraining of medical librarian should be in place so that medical librarians can successfully deliver the best that library users deserve.

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