A REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN HEALTHCARE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social work has a key role to play in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. It addresses diverse social issues that impact individual's health and well-being. Social work, as a profession, plays a crucial role in addressing social and psychological determinants of health, promoting social integration, and enhancing societal wellbeing in the context of healthcare delivery in the country. Therefore, this paper focuses on the role of social work in Nigeria's healthcare delivery. The specific objective of this paper included a look at social work as a profession and the challenges to the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Secondary sources of data were reviewed and content analyzed while the functionalist theory was utilized to buttress the paper. The paper revealed that, social workers are key players in the inter-disciplinary team of healthcare because not all illnesses require medical solutions. Some illnesses require social diagnosis and social solutions, which social workers are trained to handle and social workers in healthcare delivery play core roles in ensuring an effective and efficient health care service delivery system to meeting the social determinants of health. It was therefore recommended that: there should be constant workshops for all health professionals on what social work stands for. The management of health facilities should employ people with qualified certificates in social work to practice in the hospital settings which will enhance the quality of service.

Keywords:

Social work, healthcare delivery, functionalist perspective.

Introduction

The importance of health to every human transcends the concern of just individuals and their families. Currently, healthcare is inclusive in governmental structures and significant bodies. The growing concern for the healthcare of citizens has compelled health-related professionals and others to consider ways in which healthcare can be effectively provided to everyone. Given the fact that many factors influence the health status of people, healthcare has become multi-disciplinary (Bichi, 2015). One of the disciplines that plays prominent roles in the health sector, is the social work profession.

Social work professionals offer psychosocial care as a compliment to chemotherapeutic services provided by medical practitioners. This multidisciplinary approach to healthcare has permeated the health sectors of nations throughout the world, including Nigeria (Bywaters, Mcleod & Napier, 2009). However, nations throughout the world have successfully implemented the multidisciplinary framework of healthcare to different degrees, so professionals must remain focused on their specific areas of patient healthcare. Social work is a relatively new profession in Nigeria, as such, its professional mandate has been contentious (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012). It is in this context that it is important to explore healthcare social work, the focus of this seminar. Relevant to this discourse is the policy context within which healthcare social work is performed in Nigeria and the challenges that arise in the course of practising healthcare social work in the country.

Health policy-makers can plan their health infrastructure in macro level and pay more attention to healthcare than treatment. Due to the increasing number of patients in the community, using social workers can find the roots of illnesses and social problems in team working. This means that social workers use their unique techniques including community-based work, social objectives and the implementation of health programs based on community to play its role to the best.

Medical professionals tend to use medical model of healthcare. It means the medical history, test results, scrutiny of the symptoms, treatment of the ill person eventually lead to clinical measures and efficiency. This approach has been criticized and many believed that, it provides a paternalistic relationship between doctor and patient, it means that relative success from the perspective of a patient and the providers of treatment could be very different. With this approach World Association of Social Work for Social Workers has expressed some standard roles in order to raise health and medical services and rectify the social needs for the public (Samadi Rad, 2012).

Currently social workers across the continuum of treatment services (outpatient, acute, chronic, crisis intervention, counseling, advocacy and case management) will play their role. Participation in natural disasters, global and national challenges in line with the privatization of health-care and stress inflicted on patients and their families are the major role that social workers can be involved in (National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 2005). Social worker in a medical team helps to solve social problems in individual patients and their families, and the interaction between the patient and the family is the main role of social workers in healthcare for patients in order to obtain their health.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of social work in healthcare systems worldwide, its role in Nigeria's healthcare delivery remains underutilized and often overlooked. This lack of integration poses significant challenges in delivering comprehensive and patient-centered care (Adeoti, 2019).

Firstly, there is a shortage of qualified social workers within healthcare facilities across Nigeria. This shortage severely limits the capacity to address psycho social, emotional, and practical needs of patients and their families. As such, individuals facing complex health challenges often do not receive the holistic support they require for their overall well-being.

Secondly, there is insufficient awareness and understanding among healthcare professionals about the potential benefits of social work interventions. This hampers the effective collaboration and coordination between medical and social work teams. Without this inter professional collaboration, critical aspects of patient care such as mental health support, rehabilitation services, and discharge planning may be overlooked.

Furthermore, limited funding and resources for social work services within healthcare institutions hinder the sustainability and expansion of social work programs. This results in missed opportunities to address the social determinants of health and manage the broader social challenges faced by patients, including poverty, discrimination, and social stigma (Aigbokhaode et al., 2019).

Finally, there is a lack of policies and frameworks that recognize the role and importance of social workers in healthcare delivery. This absence of clear guidelines and standards prevents the integration of social work services into routine healthcare practices, thereby impeding the provision of comprehensive care to patients.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Steps must be taken to increase the number of qualified social workers through enhanced training programs and recruitment efforts. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public about the benefits and importance of social work in healthcare (Chukwuemeka 2015).

Moreover, adequate funding and resource allocation should be prioritized to ensure the sustainable integration of social work services within healthcare institutions. This includes developing policies and frameworks that acknowledge the vital role of social workers and outline their specific responsibilities and scope of practice.

By recognizing and effectively utilizing the role of social work in healthcare delivery, Nigeria can enhance patient outcomes, improve overall well-being, and address the broader social factors that influence health.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this paper include:

1. To examine social work as a profession;

2. To identify the essential role of social work;

3. To examine the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria; and to

4. Identify the challenges to the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria.

Methodology

The method adopted in this paper is the secondary source of data collection, using secondary data, including articles, documented journals in the area of role of social work in healthcare delivery among others. Online articles, abstracts and documentaries etc., also served as secondary information source in this study. The paper adopted this method as it helped the researcher to access existing datasets without the need for additional resources or fieldwork and also, secondary data sources play a crucial role in advancing knowledge, informing decision-making, and addressing research questions across various domains and disciplines including the health sector.

Literature review/empirical review

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Social Work

There are different definitions of the concept of social work. In layman language, it is helping poor people who do not have anything to eat and nowhere to shelter. Other people would also associate social work with the socialite activities defining it as an interest of rich people who engage in various activities for the act of kindness. But according to Ornellas et al., (2018) Social work is an applied profession of helping individuals, groups, families, communities and societies to improve their overall wellbeing by facilitating, empowering and connecting them with appropriate systems.

Despite all heavy odds and differences, the following definition was approved by the International Federation of Social workers (IFSW) General Meeting and the International Association of Schools of Social Work

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels" **(IFSW, 2014).**

Considering the sustainable social development as its major goal, social work ensures the engagement of people, institutions and systems at different levels, not only for protecting and promoting the social justice and human rights but also ensuring dignity of human beings, their overall wellbeing through specifically designed interventions suitable to their socio cultural milieu (Bhatt and Sanyal, 2019).

Social work is a profession in which trained professionals are devoted to helping vulnerable people and communities work through challenges they face in everyday life. Social workers practice in a wide variety of settings, united in their commitments to advocating for and improving the lives of individuals, families, groups and societies.

Healthcare Delivery

World Health Organization (n.d), defines healthcare delivery as the organized provision of medical care to individuals or communities. Bodenheimer (2016), an American physician and healthcare policy expert, defines healthcare delivery as the defined methods by which healthcare is provided to individuals and communities.

Shi and Singh (2019), define healthcare delivery as the arrangement of services to prevent, diagnose, and treat illness, and to promote health in a population.

2.2 Social work as a profession

A person can be considered as a professional if he/she has devoted most of his/her entire life to the activities as a means of living. Profession is a subject or area of activities a person undertakes. For example, an individual who commercially plays football as a source of income can be seen or referred to as a professional footballer. However, if an individual plays football provisionally such individual is not a professional footballer.

Professions involve essentially intellectual operations with large individuals' responsibility; who device their raw materials from science and learning and work up to a practical and definite end; possess an educationally communicable technique; tend to self-organization, and become altruistic in motivation.

Mark (2022) proposed the following attributes for any discipline to be considered as a profession.

i.   a clearly defined altruistic purpose;

ii.   transmissible theoretical knowledge (which may be trans or inter disciplinary);

iii.   specialized skills or techniques;

iv.   a high degree of individual responsibility and autonomy in decision making;

v.   self-governing association, with a credentialing process, and accountability to others within the association; and

vi.   public and political recognition as a distinct professional group (this includes prestige).

Social work has its own tradition and history and is therefore a profession in its own right, but simultaneously, it is also a profession that originated from already established scholarly traditions that were interested in human dynamics, such as philosophy, sociology, and psychology. However, social work managed the impressive accomplishment of becoming an independent profession that was able to incorporate various scholarly traditions into its professional practice (Mark, 2022).

2.3 The Role of social work in health care delivery

Generally, social work, as a profession, plays a crucial role in addressing social issues and promoting social change in Nigeria. This discipline focuses on enhancing the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities, and society at large by addressing various social challenges.

Social work in Nigeria emerged as a profession in the early 1950s, primarily influenced by international developments in social welfare. It gained recognition as a profession with the establishment of the Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW) in 1968, which aimed to coordinate and advance the profession in the country.

One of the crucial aspects of social work in Nigeria is its engagement in community and grassroots development. Social workers actively work with communities to identify and address social problems, inequalities, and injustices. They employ various approaches, including community organizing, advocacy, and empowerment, to facilitate positive change and development within communities (Chukwuemeka, 2015).

Another key area where social work has been prominent in Nigeria is child welfare. Social workers play an essential role in protecting and advocating for the rights and wellbeing of children. They engage in activities such as child protection, foster care, adoption services, and providing support to vulnerable children and families (Denga et al., 2020).

Furthermore, social work in Nigeria also focuses on mental health and psychosocial support. With the increasing recognition of mental health issues in the country, social workers collaborate with other professionals to provide counseling, therapy, and support services to individuals and families experiencing mental health challenges (Iheanacho et al., 2021).

2.3.1   Specific role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria

Social work plays a crucial role in healthcare delivery in Nigeria, addressing diverse social issues that impact individuals' health and well-being. Some specific roles of social workers in Nigerian healthcare are outlined below:

1. Psychosocial support: Social workers provide psychosocial support to individuals and families coping with various health-related issues, such as chronic illness, disabilities, or mental health conditions. For example, they offer counseling, therapy, and

emotional support to both individuals and their families thereby helping individuals with health issues navigate the psychosocial challenges that arise from their health conditions (Oredugba, 2017).

2. Community engagement and health promotion: Social workers engage communities to promote health-oriented behaviours, raise awareness about preventive measures, and encourage community participation in health campaigns (Oredugba, 2017). They facilitate community mobilization, conduct health education programmes, and collaborate with community leaders to promote health-seeking behaviours (Ikechebelu & Iloabachie, 2013). For example, organizing a general environmental cleaning in communities as a health-oriented behavior, sensitizing community members on the need to use treated mosquito nets as a preventive measure to malaria and other communicable diseases and also participation in health campaigns such as operation keep your surrounding clean by discouraging people from dumping refuse just anywhere and anyhow.

3. Care coordination and discharge planning: Social workers play a crucial role in coordinating care and discharge planning, especially for vulnerable populations. For example, social workers collaborate with healthcare teams to ensure seamless transitions between hospital and community-based care settings, facilitate access to necessary resources such as health care facilities, good drinkable water, and address psychosocial factors that may impact recovery (Ikechebelu & Iloabachie, 2013).

4. Advocacy and policy implementation: Social workers advocate for policy reforms to improve health equity and access to healthcare services. They actively participate in policy development, implementation, and evaluation processes to address social determinants of health and advocate for the rights of marginalized populations (Nigeria National Association of Social Workers, 2018).

5. Research and program evaluation: Social workers contribute to research activities and program evaluations within the healthcare sector. For example, social workers engage in various studies to understand the social determinants of health and examine the impact of interventions on vulnerable populations. Their involvement ensures evidence-based practice and informs the development of effective interventions (Aigbokhaode et al., 2019).

2.4 Challenges of the role of social work in health care delivery in Nigeria

A large number of professionals are involved in the management of disease and illnesses in modern health facilities. Thus, management of illness requires teamwork that comprised doctors, pharmacists, nurses, laboratory scientists and the social workers (Iyang, 2018). Today, several illnesses exist which require the intervention of professional social workers to work with other medical professionals to perform various roles in medical facilities aimed at restoring the general wellbeing of patients/clients. These roles played by social workers have been undermined, especially in developing countries (Adeoti, 2019; Okoye 2019). This has led to so many problems in the role of social work in health care delivery in Nigeria some of

these problems include but not limited to: inter-professional role conflict, stress on the social workers, prejudice, discrimination and structural conflicts.

Inter-professional role Conflict

There is a constant conflict between physicians and nurses, between social workers and nurses and also conflict between social workers and physicians (Merrill & Miller, 2015). Many of the challenges faced by social workers in hospital settings are professional conflict with other medical personnel which are due to divergent approached to patients' illness. Inter-professional conflicts between doctors, nurses and social workers is a major challenge in the country. Quite often, medical social workers' roles in most healthcare delivery system are not clearly defined which contributes to this inter-professional role conflicts.

Stress on the Social workers

The stress social workers face, especially those in the health care system usually results from role conflict, disagreement about good practice and lack of recognition. Many health care professionals and the general public are confused about the role of social workers in health care delivery system in Nigeria. In most cases the roles and functions of hospital social work intervention are not known, even the government and the general public are yet to appreciate the roles of social workers in health care delivery in Nigeria which usually results in conflicting role expectations because other members within the health care sector do not understand the social work role neither do they appreciate what social workers have accomplished within the health sector (Mannava et al., 2016).

Prejudice and discrimination

Social work is a respected profession in many parts of the world, but this is not the case in Nigeria where it is believed that social work practice does not require any special skills but just common sense. Even within the health facility, this problem exists as some social workers are treated with disdain and are scorn by most health workers especially doctors and nurses. Doctors and nurses are usually hostile and disrespectful to social workers and also undermine their profession (Iyang, 2018). The perceived prejudice and discrimination to social workers appeared to have been rooted in the group-think syndrome. For group members or the in-group, group-think creates a forum for strong group cohesion which is affiliated with a process that facilitates group decision making as members hold a common expectation of getting emotional reciprocity and also possess the feeling of confidence to offer counter-arguments (Brown 2015). However, for out-group, it creates enmity and rejection.

There is an absolute cooperation and loyalty among doctors, but this is not the case with social workers and are thus seen as outsiders within the healthcare system. Doctors, especially, believe that they are superior, and thus impose rules and decisions, give instruction and want to teach the social workers how to do their work. Therefore group–think could be a major source of conflict of interests between medical social workers and other

health professionals. While, group-think brings cohesion among in-group, it could endanger working relationships and limits cooperation with outsiders (Mannava et al., 2016).

Structural challenges

Beyond perceived prejudice, discrimination and conflicts, social workers are faced with infrastructural deficiencies. Like prejudice and discrimination, these challenges are system based. These include a shortage of qualified and certified social workers, poor remuneration, undue political interference, perceived corruption and inadequate facilities. This also includes structure, functions, identity, resources and education which often limits social workers' ability to quality services to patients (Adeoti, 2019).

Furthermore, financial constraint and lack of budgetary allocation are also challenges of roles of social work in healthcare delivery system in Nigeria. Virtually a lack of budget to help successfully deliver services to patients as made by the government is either cornered by the political class or insufficient to carry out their job effectively. There is also the problem of political volatility, social workers faced the challenges of operating in an environment that is under-funded, understaffed, and politically charged. Also there existed shortages of resources like stationery and transport. As a result, social workers cannot carry out home visits or do follow-up services on discharged patients. There is also the problem of lack of awareness of the roles of social workers among medical staff and knowledge of cases that require social work interventions. The paucity of knowledge about the roles of social workers in hospital settings among health professionals usually undermine and underutilize the role of social workers (Aigbokhaode et al., 2019).

2.5 Empirical review on the role of social worker in healthcare delivery

A study conducted by Oriji et al. (2015), on the Psycho-social roles of social workers in managing stressed patients in Government hospitals in Rivers State using a sample size of 300 respondents (social workers) using a descriptive design for the study. The result from the study revealed that the roles of medical social workers in counselling stressed patients in government hospitals help them recuperate for positive behaviours. This is because counselling has a relationship wherein the counsellor provides the psychosocial climate or condition in which the client is enabled to change, to become able to make choices, resolve his/her problems and develop a responsible independence which makes him or her a better member of the society. The study further revealed that social workers perform the roles of assisting stressed patients with personal belongings in government's hospitals. It also revealed that social work services are provided to patients and their families to ensure that a patient's illness, recovery and safe transition that form one care setting to another are considered within the context of his or her psychosocial need and the specific demands and opportunities of his or her environment.

Another study was conducted by Okorie (2018) on the assessment of the role of social workers in general hospital in Karu Local Government Area of Nassarawa state using a descriptive design. The result showed that social workers have helped patients in the hospital improve their well-being through education and practice. It also revealed that social workers

have being able to assess patients for any physical, mental or emotional needs as well as to assess the patient's family support and connect the patients with services to assist with care when necessary. Assistance with financial concerns, such as not being able to afford medication or pay household bills. That they also provide counselling to patients who are depressed or having difficulty coping, they also connect and refer patients to agencies that can help them with any other services that cannot be found in the hospital. The study further revealed that social workers helped educate and provide support to patients and their families. Just like nurses, physicians and therapists. They help to be sure the patient knows what services are available which can help increase patient's safety and increase the possibility that the patient will not return to the hospital.

From the above reviewed literature, it is evident that the role of social workers in healthcare delivery system cannot be over emphasized because they contribute immensely to the recovery of patients and educate them on health habits that will prevent the reoccurrence of any form of illness.

2.6 Theoretical Review

This session reviewed theory that relates to this work. The purpose is to concretely examine the corpus of theories that has accumulated in regard to the issue and concept. The theoretical review help establish what theories already exist, the relationship between them, to what degree the existing theories have been investigated and to develop new hypotheses to be tested. For the purpose of this work, the Functionalist theory was reviewed.

Functionalist Theory

Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on the functions performed in society by social structures such as institutions, hierarchies and norms (Blumler & Katz (eds), 1974). Within this theory, function refers to the extent to which a given activity promotes or interferes with the maintenance of a system. Functionalism emerged in the early 20th century and is associated with authors such as Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spencer and Robert Merton, who dominated American social theory in the 1950s and 1960s. Functionalism views society as a system (or structure) of interconnected parts such as groups, institutions (such as family, religion, economy etc) which work (function) together to maintain social equilibrium, social solidarity, and stability. It states that the social lives and behavior are guided by social structure, which are stable patterns of social behavior (Wright, 1974).

It suggests that each interconnected and interdependent parts of the structure contribute to the functioning of the whole system which is just like the human body where every part such as the brain, heart, kidney, lungs etc work together to keep the whole body system functioning. For example, each of the social institutions contributes important functions for society; the family provides an environment for reproducing, nurturing, and socializing children. Education offers a way to transfer society's skills, knowledge and culture to its youth. Politics provides a means of governing the members of society. Economies provides for the production of goods and services. Religion provides moral guidance to members of society,

and health ensures the curative and preventive of diseases so as to have a healthy member of the society, all these parts or institutions function to keep society stable. So functionalism theory focuses on consensus, social order and social stability than on change, structure and mandatory function of the parts that make up the whole.

Strength of Functionalism

According to Merton (1968), the functionalist theory viewed society as, being held together by social consensus upon which members of the society agree and they should work together to achieve (stability, order, and state of equilibrium) what is best for the society as a whole. Functionalism explains that social change occurs as a result of population growth, increased technology and contact with external society. They also explained that rapid and sudden change can disturb the equilibrium of the society to which the social institutions restore the state of equilibrium. The functionalist perspective stresses that each aspect of society is interdependent and contributes to society's stability and functioning as a whole. It means that to functionalist, each aspect of the society, either those defined as good or bad (such as deviance, crime etc) are essential for the society to continue. Therefore all these aspects have a role in keeping society stable and maintaining its social order.

Weaknesses of Functionalism

i. Functionalism emphasises social stability and order while neglecting conflict and changes which are so vital in any society. So, it failed to explain rapid social changes taking place in the society.

ii. As a macro-level theory, functionalism neglects micro-level social realities, i.e. social processes such as the social change that occurred due to cooperation, conflict, westernization etc.

iii. Functionalism is also accused of explaining the social world by ignoring the past. For example, in religion, functionalists speak of the current contribution of religion neglecting the fact that religion was introduced long back in the past and has been contributing to the survival of society till now.

The functionalist theory is being used in this paper because it helps examine the functions of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria which must be in place for the health system and other institutions within the society to function effectively. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), social determinants such as poverty, education, housing, and social support systems significantly influence health outcomes. For instance, social workers in Nigeria play a crucial role in facilitating access to healthcare services for underserved populations, advocating for policies that address income inequalities, and addressing social barriers to healthcare access such as transportation and language barriers. By addressing these social determinants, social work helps create conditions that enable individuals to achieve optimal health and well-being, consequently contributing to the overall functionality of the healthcare system.

Social work in healthcare delivery is to promote social integration. Social integration refers to the process of individuals and groups coming together to form a cohesive society. Social workers in Nigeria act as intermediaries, bridging gaps between various stakeholders in the healthcare system, including patients, families, healthcare providers, and government agencies. By promoting collaboration and communication among these stakeholders, social workers enhance social integration within the healthcare system, which in turn improves the delivery and quality of healthcare services (Merton, 1968).

Furthermore, the role of social work contributes to the overall well-being of society. The well-being of individuals and communities is intricately linked to the social and economic conditions in which they live. Social work interventions, such as community development programs, mental health services, and advocacy initiatives, help prevent and alleviate social problems that impact individual and community well-being. These interventions not only improve health outcomes but also enhance the overall functioning and stability of the healthcare system in Nigeria (Merton, 1968).

Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the major findings from the review. The work was undertaken to review the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria which was directed towards the achievement of the objectives of the study:

The study stated that social work can be considered as a profession because, social workers have devoted most of their entire life to the activities as a means of living. As a profession, it is a subject or area of activities a person undertakes. It was further found from this study that social work plays a crucial role in healthcare delivery in Nigeria, addressing diverse social issues that impact individuals' health and well-being with some specific roles of social workers in Nigerian healthcare which include psychosocial support, community engagement and health promotion, care coordination and discharge planning, advocacy and policy implementation. It was found out also that, social workers advocate for policy reforms to improve health equity and access to healthcare services, research and program evaluation, etc. Social work is not void of challenges some of which include but not limited to financial constraint, lack of budgetary allocation, political volatility, understaffed, and politically charged. Also, there exist shortages of resources like stationery and transport. As a result, social workers cannot carry out home visits or do follow-up services on discharged patients. There is also the problem of lack of awareness of the roles of social workers among medical staff and knowledge of cases that require social work interventions.

Conclusion

This paper provided insight into the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. The work made use of secondary source of data collection, which includes articles, documented journals in the line of role of social work in healthcare delivery among others. Online articles, abstracts and documentaries etc., also served as secondary information source in this study. The study explained vividly major concepts within this work such as social work, social work

as profession, roles of social work in healthcare delivery, as well as challenges of the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of social work in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Social workers are key players in the inter-disciplinary team of healthcare because not all illnesses require medical solutions. Some illnesses require social diagnosis and social solutions, which social workers are trained to handle. This position may be valid because, behind every medical diagnosis, there is always a social diagnosis, and social workers in healthcare delivery play core roles in ensuring an effective and efficient health care service delivery system to meeting the social determinants of health. However, working in the health sector by social workers in a developing country like Nigeria is highly challenging. Even though the roles of social workers in hospital settings are well-articulated in various documents, their contributions to health care service delivery are usually underestimated by other health practitioners, including sister professions. Across the country the skills and knowledge of social workers are underutilized, perhaps, due to lack of awareness of the roles and functions of social workers in medical services. Often, social work leadership roles are removed and most often social workers are required to report to nurse thereby creating several negative consequences for social work in the hospital settings.

It is important that management of the hospital industry in Nigeria take cognizance of the roles of social workers in the management of disease and illness, as they are to take care of social determinants of disease and illness. There should be constant workshops for all health professionals on what social work stands for. The management of health facilities should employ people with qualified certificates in social work to practice in the hospital settings. This will enhance the quality-of-service delivery provided by social workers and invariably lift the spirit and status of practitioners. The alleged cases of salary disparity between social workers and other health practitioners are also important areas to be looked into by stake holders in hospital industry. When these recommendations are executed with sincerity of purpose, the wellbeing of the social workers, a good working relationship and effective service delivery will be guaranteed in the hospital settings.

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