

ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN CONTAINMENT OF SPREAD OF COVID-19 INFORMATION PROVISION AND DISSEMINATION

Abubakar N. Usman

AbubakarGimba Library

Ibrahim BadamasiBabangida University Lapai Niger State.

abubakar4usman@gmail.com

Abstract

The world is still grappling with the COVID-19, the greatest killer pandemic disease seen in modern times. It is a phenomenon that continues to test the integrity of the medical facilities of nations, the competence of leaders and capacity for good timing response to crises. The paper adopts secondary data to discuss the roles of librarians as one of agents of information dissemination on COVID-19. The study established that COVID-19 is real; as such people should adhere strictly to any information as regards its prevention to save lives. In the same vein, citizen's suspicions and distrust for government has deepened and due to inadequate strategies put in place to contain it. This then behoove information managers to go extra miles in making vital and current information available to cushion its effect. The paper finally recommends that Librarians should do their best in providing the needed information to curtail the spread of the disease.

Keywords: COVID-19, librarians, containment, information provision, dissemination

Introduction

The pivotal role of librarians at this crucial time of COVID-19 pandemic cannot be under estimated. Medical librarian may provide information about new medical treatments, clinical trials, and standard procedures to health professionals, patients, consumers, and corporations. Government document librarians, who work in a variety of depository libraries in each of the states, preserve and disseminate government publications, records, and other documents that make up a historical record of government actions. COVID-19 has drastically impoverished our lives and inflicted unquantifiable economic losses on many nations. Librarians /information professionals can process, organize and disseminate information to the public on the ways to contain the pandemic.

Methodology

This paper adopts secondary data such as text books, journals, newspapers, websites, conference proceedings, reports, standards, manuscripts, and special collections, patents, theses, social media, dictionaries, encyclopedias among others. All these platforms provide information s on researches of human development.

Conceptual Discourse

Corona-Virus

It was reported in various media that Corona virus started in China in the city of Wuhan towards the tail end of year 2019. The virus started spreading from the first cluster in the capital of Chinas Hubei province to a pandemic that has killed thousands

of people worldwide. Dr Michelle Baker, an immunologist at Chinese Scientific and Research Organization (CSIRO) who studies viruses, in bats, says some of the researches on COVID-19 origins have stepped off from what was known from the past. The renowned immunologist concluded that the virus originated in a bat.

In Nigeria, the virus was first announced on February, 2020 (NCDC, 2020). The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control announced this on February 28 2020 the first case of Corona virus disease confirmed in Nigeria. The announcement goes thus: The Federal Ministry of health has confirmed a corona virus disease (COVID-19) Case in Lagos State Nigeria. The case which was confirmed on the 27th of February 2020 is the first case to be reported in Nigeria since the beginning of the outbreak in China in 2019. Nigeria Minister of health, Ehanire (2020) asserted that " The case is an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February 2020. He was confirmed by Virology Laboratory Hospital part of the Laboratory Network of the Nigeria Center for Disease Control. The patient is clinically stable with no serious symptoms and is being managed in the infectious Disease Hospital in Yaba, Lagos." Ever since then, the disease has been spreading across nations killing hundreds of thousands of people.

In addition, Ehanire (2020) during the daily Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 revealed that about 113 medical doctors in Nigeria have tested positive, and the cases keep rising. With this there is that need whereby medical experts would be able to diagnose the victims of COVID-19, by not necessarily coming in contact with the patients.

Similarly, an Abuja based telemedicine organization, Gention Global Resources has launched smart e-Clinic and ICU solution center. The launching of smart e-Clinic and ICU solutions centre by telemedicine organization, Gention Global Resources (G-CEIBA) had greatly improved medical librarians service delivery. Clinical technology innovation such as Tele ICU and e-Clinic web, mobile application become imperative as a result of the risk associated with frontline health workers in the course of attending to Covid-19 patients (G-CEIBA, 2020).

It is pertinent to point out that with the towering number of Covid-19 cases across the globe and its pressure on existing healthcare structure, the importance of mHealth/ telehealth facilities to allow health providers to see and monitor patients without being in the same room becomes paramount. Trained medical librarians could handle this information dissemination medium more efficiently and perfectly by availing users in their content source(s). By this, virtually, patients could be attended to in real time, make routine visits and follow patients vitals while keeping the doctor or nurse a safe distance away from the infection.

Librarians and COVID-19

Librarians have been playing their functions as professional information providers and disseminators Madu *et al.*, (2017). Information on Corona virus come in various

channels, and as such these information need to be, sourced, organized, processed and made available with ease to users/ public. Information in their sources needed to be sieved and made available for the users/researchers to use. As earlier observed, information could be in books, journals, manuscripts, newspapers, among others. Librarians would sieve information from these sources and down load them most especially those on the net for users to accelerate their researches.

Suffice to say that information in newspapers can also be made available to users quoting the paper, page and the author of the article. This will make researchers access with ease the information from their various sources without wasting much time reading through the whole newspaper(s) finding where the article or the page in which the information is contained. Information is virtually, now on net and as such, librarians are to fetch this information for users / researchers to access. These could be done by down loading, photocopying, pasting or even conversion of some information into other forms such as those in text to video or audio and vice versa for easy comprehension by users.

The cure for corona virus has been a major concern to researchers worldwide; hence any available information in whatever format or channel must be made available for the benefit of mankind. This is the time where information technology based library service is mostly needed. Librarians can interpret information in digitized form for users. Information in text, audio, pictures, video and animation could be converted into one medium which is referred to multimedia or a digitized format. All these innovation sin the information circle had gone a long way in packaging and making it easier for researchers to access.

This time calls for a more proficient, robust and current Information Technology – based library services. Services such as Information Alerting Services (IAS), OPAC and Web PAC services and Digital Reference Services (DRS) , constituted Information Technology – based library services. Information alerting services notifies library users about new or current arrivals in the library and are issued regularly and periodically by the library management and commercial publishers. Examples of these alerting tools include newsletters, indexing and abstracting services.

According to Bhatt (2018), most of these services are available as web-based data and lastly we have selective dissemination of information (SDI), whereby new items of information from primary or secondary sources are selectively directed to individuals based on their current interests in a particular subject. Digital reference service is also one of the major service or areas of activity that librarian could provides at this time of covid-19. Chopra (2002), asserted that this service type is also referred to as Ask-An-Expert or Ask- A – Librarian.

These services are Internet- based question and answer service that connect users with individuals who possess specialized subject knowledge and skill in conducting precision searches. Users / researchers could ask questions where to fetch information

concerning their areas of research which librarians can provide. This platform allows reference librarians to reach out to the users using the network instead of waiting at the reference desk for users to come by. The medical reference librarian Apart from giving instructions to users on how to use library, the medical librarian also involve himself/herself in the deliverance of reference service that may need much intellectual understanding. Digital reference services use the internet to place people in contact with people who can answer specific question and instruct users on developing certain skills.

Ways to contain the virus: treatment/ prevention/ control

Writing on pandemic issues and the governing elite, Ayodeji (2020), asserted that Nigeria has a wide range of pandemic and very serious national issues that call for fierce urgency of action on the part of our governing elites especially the current Covid-19 pandemic ravaging the whole world now. There is currently no approved specific treatment or vaccine against COVID-19 Infection. As such patients require supportive care and oxygen supplementation. This can be a only carried out via non-invasive ventilation.

The Nigeria should borrow a leave from Saudi Arabic by installing sterilization gates in major places of worship such as Mosques and Churches. The Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques has commenced installation of sterilization gates at Masjid Al Haram. The equipment can automatically scan and sterilize those who pass through the gates before entering the Mosque. The most preventive measures as offered by the World Health Organization (WHO) are: regular and thorough washing of hands, with soap and water and alcohol –based hand sanitizers under running water or tape, maintaining at least 1 and half meters (5 feet) distance between oneself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing since the virus is air bone, stay home if you feel unwell with symptoms like fever, cough and difficulty in breathing, do not engage in self –medication.

Others include cover your nose, mouth with a tissue, stay informed on the latest development about COVI-19 via official channels on TV and Radio; restriction of persons who are presumed to have been exposed to a contagious disease but are not ill, either because they did not become infected or because they are still in the incubation period, quarantined persons will need psychological support, food and water, and household and medical supplies among several others

Conclusion

This study established that COVID-19 is real; as such people should adhere strictly to any information as regards its prevention to save lives. In the same vein, the effect of the pandemic has deepened citizen's suspicions and distrust for government due to inadequate strategies put in place to contain it. This then behooves information managers to go extra miles in making vital and current information available to cushion its effect. Technology had empowered information professionals such as librarians in discharging this responsibility. Librarians should do their best in providing

the needed information on this virus. The coming of COVID-19 has really dealt with the whole world, and as such researches were on every where finding its cure. These challenged medical librarians to provide information without delay to the public most especially the researchers finding solutions to it. Citizens must not abuse social media and indulge in spreading misinformation on COVID-19 that causes fear and panic.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore made:

1. There is that strong need on the part of the government to strengthening health sector by training and retraining of medical staff
2. Research institutes should be adequately funded even after COVID-19
3. There is that need on the part of government also to engage the innovators. This assignment can be given to Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS)
4. Medical staff must be adequately motivated for better and effective performances especially now that their lives are at risk in the course of treating coronavirus patients.
5. The three major languages of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo should be engaged in translating messages on covid-19 to their listeners both at federal, state and local government levels
6. Town criers should also be involved in passing information on the control of the disease and its management
7. Information disseminators should be encouraged pasting articles or papers containing information on the virus that could be beneficial to them at major public centers
8. On market days, chiefs and village heads should be involved in making announcements on the virus especially on ways as announced by the government to contain it.
9. National Orientation Agency (NOA) be mandated to carry the message to the grassroots, villages and towns.
10. Radio jingles and radio talks be put in place to enlighten the public on the consequences of the virus.
11. The government should be magnanimous enough in providing palliatives to the vulnerable in the community during lockdown periods.

This study is limited to qualitative method using secondary data. Future studies should adopt either quantitative or mixed method to generate more data on the subject matter.

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