

Relevance of Psychology in National Health Care Delivery System

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Abstract: *Objective:* Health care delivery system in Nigeria has long adopted medical model alone. This has been the result of ignorance of the broad field of Psychology and its contributions in the national psyche. This paper explored the need for psychology and how psychology can contribute meaningfully to the Nigerian National health care delivery system. *Method:* A descriptive analytic procedure was adopted in this article. The bio-psychosocial model to health care system is strongly advocated. In this model the World Health Organization's definition of health as a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being of an individual and not merely absence of disease, which according to Taylor is at the core of health psychology is strongly advocated. *Results:* However, the current trend in Nigerian hospitals is far from satisfactory and thus the need to reposition the place of psychology in the National health care delivery system. *Conclusions:* To achieve this balance in the National health care system, it is emphasized that hospitals across the Nation should create a psychology unit, with well-trained psychologist in the clinical sub specialty to handle broad range of psychological disorders manifest in wide range of cliental population, while health psychologist should be appointed in the States and National boards and ministries of health to help in formulating health policies that will have far reaching effects in the nation.

Key words: Health Care System • Psychology • National Health Care • Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

“Health they say is wealth and a healthy nation is wealthy nation”. The health conditions of the citizenry of any nation should be given upper most considerations by the leaders of the nations. This is why there is increasing budgetary allocations to the health sectors. For example the United States of America (USA) spends more than one trillion US Dollars annually on health making health care the largest service industry in the United States. In Nigeria, the health sector taking almost 25% of annual budgetary allocation.

Health Care a Multidisciplinary Approach: The provision of adequate health care delivery system in Nigeria is multidisciplinary; involving the functions of several health professionals trained in the medical and paramedical fields and who have acquired the necessary skills to provide the needed expertise in the health sector. These professionals include the medical doctors,

psychiatrists, nurses, pharmacists, psychologists, medical laboratory scientists, radiographers, anesthetists, environmental health officers, health social workers etc. who work either in state general hospitals, federal hospitals and medical centres, community hospitals, teaching hospitals, private clinics etc., while others function as administrators, consultants and planners of health policies at the local, states and federal ministries of health. This multidisciplinary approach to adequate health provision in the Nation calls for all relevant hands to be on deck to realize the World Health Organization (WHO) call for health to all. In this connection the relevance of psychology in national health care delivery system comes to attention. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the nature of clinical/health psychology by describing what clinical/health psychologists do and where they do it, what roles they play along side other professionals who also tend to people's mental health needs in Nigeria. In the process, we will better appreciate the need for psychologists in the National health care delivery system.

What Is Health: Fundamental to research and practice in health psychology is the definition of health. The WHO, defined health as ‘a complete state of physical, mental and social well being of an individual and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This definition according to [1] is at the core of health psychologist’s conception of health. Rather than defining health as the absence of illness, health is recognized to be an achievement involving balance among physical, mental and social well being. Health means wellness or optimum state of health. Therefore any meaningful attempt at providing proper health care for the nation, effort must be made by the health policy makers to achieve this balance in physical, mental and social well being of Nigerians.

The Bio-Psychosocial Model: To achieve the broad objective of the WHO definition of health the Biopsychosocial Model must be adopted in National health delivery system. The idea that mind and body together determine health and illness logically implies a bio-psychosocial model with the fundamental assumption that health and illness are consequences of the inter play of biological, psychological and social factors [2]; [3]. The bio-psychosocial model maintains that health and illness are caused by multiple factors and produce multiple effects. The model further maintains that the mind and body cannot be distinguished in matters of health and illness because both so clearly influence an individual’s state of health. From this view point, health becomes something that one achieves through attention to biological, psychological and social needs rather than something that is taken for granted (WHO,1948). Consequently, health, illness and medical care are all interrelated processes involving interacting changes within the individual and on these various levels.

Clinical Implication of the Biopsychosocial Model: The implications of this model are firstly it maintains that the process of diagnosis should always consider the interacting role of biological, psychological and social factors in assessing an individual’s health or illness. Thus suggesting that an interdisciplinary team approach may be best way to diagnosis [3]. Secondly, this model emphasizes that recommendation for treatment must also examine all three sets of factors. By doing this, it should be possible to target therapy uniquely to a particular individual, consider a person’s health status in total and make treatment recommendations that can deal with more than one problem simultaneously.

Thirdly, the bio-psychosocial model makes explicit the significance of the relationship between patient and practitioner. An effective patient-practitioner relationship can improve a patient’s use of services as well as the efficacy of treatment and the rapidity with which illness is resolved.

In this regard psychology tries to cover the psychological dimensions in this tripartite approach to adequate health care provisions in the country. The fields of psychology that focus on health issues are clinical and health psychology. Health psychology is a newly emerging field in psychology devoted to understanding psychological influences on how people stay healthy, why they become ill and how they respond when they do get ill. Health psychologists both study such issues and promote interventions to help people stay well or get over illness. For example, a health psychologist may be interested and conduct research to know why people continue to smoke even though they know that smoking increases their risk of cancer and heart disease or why people still indulge in sexual immorality although they know that unprotected sex is a major source for HIV/AIDS transmission as well as other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Information about why people smoke helps the researcher both understand this poor health habit and design interventions to help people stop smoking [3]. Health psychology is concerned with all aspects of health and illness across the life span [4]. Health psychologist focus on health promotion and maintenance, which includes such issues as how to get children to develop good health habit, how to promote regular exercises and how to design a media campaign to get people to improve their diets. Health psychologists also study the psychological aspects of prevention and treatment of illness. A health psychologist might teach people in high stress occupation how to manage stress effectively, so that it will not adversely affect their health. A health psychologist might work with people who are already ill to help them adjust more successfully to their illness or to learn to follow their treatment regimen. Health psychologists also focus on the etiology and correlates of health, illness and dysfunction. Health psychologists are especially interested in the behavioural and social factors that contribute to health or illness and dysfunction, such as alcohol consumption, smoking, exercise, wearing of seat belt and ways of coping with stress. Finally, health psychologists analyze and attempt to improve the health care system and the formulation of health policy.

They study the impact of health institutions and health professionals on people's behaviour and develop recommendations for improving health care.

In summary, health psychology represents the educational, scientific and professional contributions of psychology to the promotion and maintenance of health; the prevention and treatment of illness; the identification of the causes and correlates of health, illness and related dysfunction, the improvement of the health care.

While Clinical psychology a closely related discipline, according to [5] involves research, teaching and services relevant to the applications of principles, methods and procedures of psychology for understanding, predicting and alleviating intellectual, emotional, biological, psychological, social and behavioural maladjustment, disability and discomfort, applied to a wide range client population. According to [5] the skill areas central to the field of clinical psychology include assessment and diagnosis, intervention or treatment, consultation, research and application of ethical and professional principles. Clinical psychologists are distinguished by their expertise in the areas of personality and psychopathology and their integration of science theory and practice.

The Need for Psychology in National Health Care System: Psychology is a relatively new discipline and before now not much has been known about psychology and its contributions to health care system in Nigeria. This is made clearer by [6]. In his paper 'Clinical psychology in the African continent' noted that clinical psychology arrived late in the African continent. However this newly emerging discipline has continued to demonstrate its importance to the improvement of people's health conditions across the nation. A number of trends within medicine, psychology and health care system have contributed to the increasing roles for health and clinical psychologists in Nigeria.

Firstly, the current state of knowledge about health care issues has virtually demanded the field of health psychology. Beginning in the renaissance until today, the great technological strides made by scientists like [4] work in microscopy have continued to shape and form the basis of medical practice. As a result of such advances, medicine looked more and more to the medical laboratory and bodily factors rather than to the mind, as a basis for medical progress. For over 300 years, physicians focused primarily on organic and cellular changes and pathology

as a basis for their medical inferences and physical evidence became the sole basis for diagnosis and treatment of illness [7]. According to [7] with the Psychoanalytic contributions this view began to change with the rise of modern psychology, particularly with [5] early work on conversion hysteria. According to Freud, specific unconscious conflicts can produce particular disturbances that symbolize the repressed psychological conflicts. In conversion reaction (hysteria), the patient converts the conflict into a symptom via the voluntary nervous system, he or she then becomes relatively free of the anxiety the conflict would otherwise produce [5]. Some researchers, [8] extended the work of Freud by linking patterns of personality rather than a single specific conflict to specific illnesses. For example Alexander developed a profile of the ulcer prone personality as someone whose disorder is caused primarily by excessive need for dependency and love. [8] and [9] works helped to shape the emerging field of psychosomatic medicine by offering profiles of particular disorders believed to be psychosomatic in origin – that is bodily disorders caused by emotional conflicts; ulcers, hyperthyroidism, rheumatoid arthritis, essential hypertension, neurodermatitis, colitis and bronchial asthma [8]. Though some criticisms were raised against the early psychosomatic movement, it laid the groundwork for a profound change in beliefs about the relationship of the mind and the body [2]. It is now known that physical health is inextricably interwoven with the psychological and social environment. All conditions of health and illness, not just the disease are influenced by psychological and social factors. The treatment of illness and prognosis for recovery are substantially affected by such factors as the relationship between patients and practitioner and expectation about pain and discomfort. Staying well is heavily determined by good health habits, all of which are under one's personal control and by such socially determined factors as stress and social support. The mind and body cannot be meaningfully separated in matters of health and illness [1].

For emphasis it must be noted that an adequate understanding of what keeps people healthy or make them stay well is impossible without knowledge of the psychological and social context within which health and illness are experienced. This current conception of the role of the mind in illness is many of the factors that have continued to make psychology have a greater impact in the health care delivery system. For example in the

treatment of mental illnesses, depressive disorders and emotional disturbances in particular, the continued use of psychiatric medications alone, without investigations into the root cause of the disturbances in the individual with a commensurate psychological and social remedial measures has been shown to be inadequate and often lead to relapses in 60% of cases handled at FETHA. While the relapse rate for schizophrenic patients treated at Neuropsychiatric hospital Enugu, Nigeria was significantly higher for those treated with anti psychotics alone than those with a combined psychological and psycho pharmacological approach. In some cases with somatization features, the condition does not abate significantly with drug treatment alone [3]. Also anti retroviral drug treatment combined with CBT procedures were reported to be more efficacious than chemotherapy alone [7]. For example, research on cognitive products in depression has shown that negative cognitive schema structures generally dissipate in a concurrent fashion with improvement from an episode of depression, [1], [3], [5], [8], [4], [2]; [7], [6], [9], [10], [11] and [12] with few consistent differences between individuals treated with cognitive therapy and those treated with pharmacotherapy [13] [14] [15], [16], [17] and [18]

Several other factors have continued to make the relevance of psychology in the health care delivery system in the Nigeria more glaring. These factors include the type of functions and services rendered by psychologists in the health care services.

Changing Pattern of Illness: The changing pattern of illness resulting from technological advancement in the medical services has contributed to create increasing role for psychologists in the health sector. Until the 20th century the major cause of illness and death in Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Chad and else where like USA, U.K., Canada, France etc were acute disorders – especially tuberculosis, pneumonia, cholera, malaria and other infections diseases (WHO, 1996). Acute disorders are short term medical illness, often the result of a viral or bacterial invader and usually amenable to cure [1]. But the nature of present forms of illnesses has changed to more chronic disorders. Illnesses like heart disease, aids, cancer HIV/AIDS and diabetes are the main contributors to disability and death, especially in the industrialized counties. But in Nigeria death resulting from accidents which are closely tied with behavioural problems like alcoholism and aggression are on the increase. Chronic

illnesses are slowly developing diseases which people live with and often regarded as terminal diseases. Often chronic disease has no cure rather, only managed by patient, relatives and health care provider working together. Chronic illnesses have created an increasing demand for health and clinical psychologists because of the following reasons. Firstly, these are diseases in which psychological and social factors are implicated as causes. For example, personal health habits, such as diet and smoking, are implicated in the development of heart disease and cancer and sexual activity is critically important in the likelihood of developing acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Consequently health psychologists are needed to explore these causes and develop ways to modify these behaviours.

Secondly because chronic illnesses are long lasting, in some cases may be terminal, psychological issues arise in connection with them. Health psychologists help the chronically ill adjust psychologically and socially to their changing health state. They help those with chronic illness develop treatment regimens, many of which involve self-care. Chronic illnesses affect family functioning, including relationships with a partner and/ or children and health psychologist both explore these changes and help ease the problems in family functioning that may result,[1].

Expansion in health care services is another set of factors that has contributed to the rising roles of psychologists in the health care services. Health care cost in Nigeria is on the increase, almost becoming one of the leading service industries in the country. In recent years, the health care industry has come under increasing scrutiny because the massive increases in health care costs have not brought with them improvement in basic quality of health. [1] maintained that health psychology represents an important perspective on these issues for several reasons. One of them being that, because containing health care costs is so important, health psychology's main emphasis on prevention- namely, modifying people's risky health behaviours before they ever become ill- has the potential to reduce the amount of money devoted to the management of illness.

Increased medical acceptance is another reason for rising roles of the psychologists in our national health care services. Although psychologists have been employed in the health settings not for many years, their value is increasingly recognized by physicians and other health care professionals. Unlike in the past when the role

of the psychologist in health care was largely confined to the task of administering and interpreting the tests results of individuals who were suspected of being psychologically disturbed. Psychologists then usually saw only the 'problem patients' who were difficult for medical staff to manage or whose physical complaints were believed to be psychological in origin. Patients who had complaints that could be readily attributed to medical problem and who were easy to manage were considered not to have psychological problems and were therefore thought to be outside the psychologist's province of expertise. Presently, however, caregivers are increasingly recognizing that psychological and social factors are always important in health and illness. Accordingly, the role of the psychologist in changing patients' health habits and contributing to treatment is increasingly being acknowledged and accepted within the medical community, [13]. This is more so because clinical and health psychologists have continued to demonstrate that they can make substantial contributions to health [14]. [15] in his paper titled 'the psychologist among doctors' gave credence to this by stating that he was able to gain the confidence and respect of the medical team at University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital Enugu (UNTH) by demonstrating that he has the training and skill to handle most illnesses with psychological origin, which often defied medical attention. He was soon appointed consultant clinical psychologist and held the position of dean, college of health sciences for three consecutive times and was thereafter appointed deputy provost, college of medicine.

Both the health and clinical as well as the counseling psychologists have developed a variety of short-term behavioural interventions to address a wide variety of health-related problems, including managing pain; modifying bad health habits, such as smoking; and managing the side or treatment effects associated with a range of chronic diseases. Such interventions, particularly those that target risk factors such as diet or smoking, have contributed to the actual decline in the incidence of some diseases, especially coronary heart disease. Psychologists have long shown that informing patients fully about procedures and sensations involved in unpleasant medical procedures, such as surgery, improves their adjustment to those procedures. In this regard many hospitals and other treatment centres now require psychologists to routinely prepare patients for such procedures.

Psychologists make important methodological contributions to issues of health and illness. Many of issues that arise in medical settings demand rigorous research investigation, [1]. As Taylor rightly pointed out, the health/clinical psychologists can be a valuable member of a hospital research team by providing the methodological and statistical expertise that is the hallmark of good training in psychology.

In summary the relevance of psychology in the health care system could be made clearer by stating the number and kinds of psychological problems found in patients in the hospitals, places of work, schools and communities. Though numerous, they include depression, anxiety, psychosis, personality disorders, mental retardation, addictions, learning disabilities, juvenile delinquencies, vocational problems and sexual difficulties etc. Defining the activities of the psychologists in terms of these problems will make one appreciate how enormous and formidable the function psychologists play in the health care delivery system. The psychologists work as a team with other mental health professionals in providing the appropriate treatment protocols for patients having these disorders in general, psychiatric or mental homes, homes for the mentally retarded etc. The activities of the psychologists in these places include therapy and intervention, diagnosis/assessment, research, consultation, administration and counseling of people with wide range of difficulties including aids victims.

Through these procedures psychologists in Nigeria have made great impact in solving numerous psychological and social problems confronting the people. Problems like drug addiction and alcoholism is rampant amongst our youths in the Universities and colleges [6] as well as in adults, bringing with them other problems like unprotected sex with the attendant rise in unwanted pregnancies, frustrations, HIV/AIDS transmission and sudden deaths. But psychologists working in the area of alcohol and addiction controls [16], [17] have continued to provide both therapeutic assistance to victims and scientific research solutions to this malady. Other social problem like child abuse and neglect abound in Nigeria at a dangerous dimension. For example, [18] noted with dismay the scandalous situations of various forms of existence of our children, like child abandonment, forced marriage and the medical consequences such as emotional trauma, vesico-vaginal fistula(VVF) etc., child labour and battering, street beggars, child ritual killings for get-rich-quick syndrome

of Nigerians, child sex abuse and prostitution. These and some others more have been the focus of prominent psychologists working in this area to solve these problems. The African Network for Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) with Professor Peter O.Ebigbo has been at the fore front of this battle.

CONCLUSION

In the fore going, efforts have been to bring out the essential and critical roles the psychologists have to play in providing functional health care in Nigeria. However, the situation as currently obtained does not meet the proper standard. It is pertinent to note that most of the hospitals in Nigeria don't engage the services of psychologists to provide these essential professional roles. Rather, the medical doctors and other non psychologists and charlatans usurp these functions to the detriment of professionalism. A basic and more worrisome situation is the non existence of a national scheme of service for clinical Psychology despite effort by eminent scholars in field to the bill passed at the National Assembly. To this effect, the National association of Clinical Psychologists (NACP) in their annual conference in august 2014 at Enugu, Nigeria called for proper recognition of the profession in the national health care system, insisting that every state and federal hospital should have a psychology unit with at least a certified clinical psychologist to man it. If this is done, the health care delivery system in Nigeria will be better and more functional.

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