

The structure and Policy of Traditional Medicine in Nigeria: A Review

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Abstract

As it is known in other parts of the world, traditional medicine is as old as ancient people in Nigeria. Traditional medicine began with the use of herbs and animals in the treatment of certain ailments by ancient people. Traditional medicine is known as traditional healing. Traditional healer provides healthcare services based on religious background, culture, attitude and beliefs that are available to him or his community. Diseases are perceived as having both supernatural and natural causes and therefore should be cured via both spiritual and physical ways. The practice of traditional medicine in Nigeria is faced with challenges even though it is contributing immensely to the healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Not only that but also the fact that the field of traditional medicine is still battling with policy issues in Nigeria regarding its formalization to be part of the formal public healthcare delivery system in the country. This review dwells on traditional medicine in Nigeria, its categories, forms, benefits, challenges and policy measures. Based on the challenges highlighted, the paper made such suggestions as the government should take care of training and re-training of practitioners of traditional medicine on modern techniques of diagnoses, prescriptions etc to standard and more conventional etc. The paper concluded that if the policy content is effectively implemented, traditional medicine practices and status in Nigeria will surely be fully part and parcel of the conventional health care delivery system.

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I. Introduction

The practice of traditional medicine in Nigeria has a long history dated back to the Stone Age. The practice is much older than some other medical sciences and is much more prevalent compared to orthodox modern medicine. The term traditional medicine describes medical knowledge and practice systems which were developed over countries within various societies before the era of modern medicine (Folashade, et al 2015). WHO viewed traditional medicine as the total combination of knowledge and practices, whether applicable or not, used in the diagnosis, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social disease and which may rely exclusively on past experiences and observations handed down from generation to generation, verbally or in writing. Traditional medicine is also known as native, folk, indigenous or alternative medicine.

However, the traditional medicine practitioner in a community is known as a traditional healer. A traditional healer is described by Folashade, et al (2015) as a person who is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care by using medicinal plants/vegetables, animals and mineral substances and certain other methods. Folashade, et al (2015) further asserts that his methods are based on socio-cultural and religious backgrounds as well as knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that are prevalent in the community regarding the causes of diseases and disabilities, and the maintenance of the physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being of the people.

The traditional healthcare system was developed in recognition of the pervasive importance of good health without which there will be no life (Adefolaju, 2011). Thus, every human being tends to fall sick, thereby unable to perform as expected by society. For this, all societies crave good health for their inhabitants. A sick person in traditional Nigeria is deemed by his/her family members as a burden that is to be taken care of by the entire members of family concerning their energy, time and resources. Sickness becomes a social problem whereby the society ensures the good health of its members by encouraging them to patronize health practitioners. Good health is regarded as the state of total effective physiologic and psychological functioning

(Adefolaju, 2011). WHO views health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Traditional Medicine in Nigeria

Different tribal groups in Nigeria have different traditional healthcare delivery system. A practitioner of traditional medicine in the northern part of the country is referred to as "Boka" while "Babalawo" in the southern part and "Dibia" in the eastern part of the country. Traditional medicine has a great impact on the lives of people in Nigeria especially the rural residents who for one reason or another patronize traditional medicine. Patronizing traditional medicine by the majority of the populace in the rural area has something to do with limited access to conventional medicine and other factors such as fear of fake or expired drugs and cost.

However, with technological advancement, practitioners of traditional medicine in Nigeria today have good skills and knowledge of pharmaceutical substances of many natural products which in turn help them in the management of many different ailments. Not only that but also the fact that there exist different training institutions of traditional medicine where expert practitioners of traditional medicine share cultural views of diseases with young upcoming traditional doctors. On this, Ozioma & Chinwe (2019) posit that various schools exist for both herbal medicine and homoeopathy, and as such, most modern traditional health practitioners have great knowledge of pharmaceutical properties of herbs and the shared cultural views of diseases in the society and they combine their knowledge with modern skills and techniques in processing and preserving herbal medicines, as well as in the management of diseases. To ascertain the facts, Ozioma & Chinwe (2019) interviewed two modern traditional practitioners in persons of Dr Anselm Okonkwo and Mr Uche Omengoli both from Enugu state in Nigeria. They disclosed that their knowledge and skills of traditional medical practice were handed down by aged relatives who were also in the practice by both tutelage and supernatural means. They also confirmed that they improve their knowledge through further training, interaction with colleagues, consultation of books and the internet.

Thus, the majority of the population in Nigeria like other developing countries patronize traditional medicine for socio-cultural, religious and economic reasons. Culturally, many people grew up to have found one or more plant, animal or incantation is used in their family or community to cure or treat one or the other ailment by the elderly ones more especially in rural areas. For example, people from the north traditionally use "nymph tree", leaves or fibre to cure dysentery and this experience can be narrated by even a child often. Also, some practitioners of traditional medicine believe in the fact that such illnesses related to spirits as madness can only be treated through religion. It is an acknowledged fact that traditional medicine is cheaper and easy to access than conventional medicine. For this economic reason, people often tend to patronize traditional medicines which by stretching your hand, you can take for free or at a cheaper price. These are some of the reasons that traditional medicine and its practitioners are here to stay in Nigeria though it is not integrated with the formal health care delivery system.

Categories of Traditional Medicine in Nigeria

Traditional Medicine is of different categories. It is systematically understood from three different perspectives that include divination, spiritualism and physical perspective. Divination is a traditional healing system through consulting the spirit world. It is a way through which information regarding a person or any condition of health is retrieved via the use of an assemblage of symbols to receive healing knowledge. Ozioma & Chinwe (2019) given this, divination in traditional medicine is a way to access information that is normally beyond the reach of the rational mind.

Spiritualism is perceived to be part and parcel of traditional medicine practices in Nigeria. It is normally applied in the healing process if the cause of the illness is expected to be an attack from evil spirits. The practise involves the use of a talisman, amulets, charm etc to treat the victim by chasing away the evil spirits. These are traditions used to drive away evil spirits or any danger caused by spirits in a community or family. Sacrifices are also offered sometimes when the gods, spirits or ancestors make a request. In most cases more especially in the North, animals such as ram, goat and even cow are used for the sacrifices. Thus, sacrifices take different forms as burying animals alive, slaughter or burning them to ashes. Another form of spiritualism is spiritual cleansing in which the patient is required to bathe at specific times for a given number of days either with blood or water. Other forms are appeasing the gods, and libation which involves invocation, supplication and conclusion.

Another category of traditional medicine in Nigeria is the physical healing process. It involves three major forms that include herbals, clay and herbs application and counselling. Herbals are used to treat a patient according to the nature of the disease. Some instructions regarding dosage, timeframe and implications of overdose are usually disclosed to the patient by the herbalist. Clay application is sometimes used under certain conditions. It is applied for certain days as a healing process and the mixture is usually applied all over the body from head to toes. The understanding is that human problems can simply be tackled using clay because they are created from it. Counselling is another form of the physical traditional healing process which emphasizes

providing a patient with advice concerning what to do and not to do under certain conditions. For examples, a patient may be told to stop eating some foods or drinks etc.

Forms of Traditional Medicine in Nigeria

The field of traditional medicine in Nigeria is broad in the sense that, there are different forms of it being practised. It is obtainable in Nigeria's structure of traditional medicine such forms as bone setting, birth attendants, mind and spirit therapy, massage, circumcision surgery, psychotherapy, spinal manipulation, reflexology etc. Most of these practices are found in Nigeria in the locality or the other but the most common practices are traditional bath attendants, bone setting, traditional surgery, and practitioners of herbal medicine.

1. Traditional Birth Attendants

A birth attendant is one of the forms of traditional medicine in Nigeria. A birth attendant is a person who acquires skills of child delivery through the cultural face and gives a helping hand during childbirth. World Health Organization views Traditional Birth Attendant as a person who assists the mother at childbirth and who acquired skills of delivering babies by himself/herself or by working with other birth attendants. There are both males and females as birth attendants, especially in Southern and Eastern Nigeria. Contrary to that, there are female birth attendants in the Northern part for cultural and religious reasons. It is believed that there are about 85% of birth attendants more especially in rural areas. They provide prenatal, natal and post-natal services to mothers. In some instances, their work begins right from the perception to the day of delivery and after.

2. Bone Setting Practitioners

The bone setting is another form of traditional medicine being practised in Nigeria. Bone setters are those practitioners of traditional medicine who specialized in repairing fractures, dislocations and other orthopaedic issues. Bone setters in Nigeria are highly recognized for their skills and experience in setting broken bones using traditional methods and often achieve success. They will be able to diagnose a patient and find out whether the injury is a fracture or dislocation. They set bones, give a timeline for the healing process and provide follow-up services to make sure all is well. For simple fractures and dislocations, bone setting in Nigeria is seen to have achieved a meaningful level of success. Given this, Folashade, et al (2015) posit that traditional bone setting has attained a level of success comparable to that in orthodox in Nigeria for simple fractures and dislocations.

3. Traditional Surgery

There are several practices in Nigeria's traditional medicine which are termed traditional surgery because the practices involve to some extent using traditionally made sharp objects to operate on patients. The types of traditional surgery include among others male and female circumcision, tribal marks, whitlow operation, cupping etc. Circumcision is a simple surgical operation carried out on both male or female using special knives and scissors. The traditional recipe is used to stop and manage bleeding after the operation. Tribal mark is the art of cutting marks into the cheeks, forehead and belly of a person as traditional identity by a traditional surgeon. Herbs may be used to stop bleeding after the surgery. Treatment of whitlow in Nigeria is mostly done by traditional surgeon more especially in rural areas. This involves the use of some traditional herbs to make the infected finger easily collect pus and then operate on it. Other surgeries involve among others cutting of epiglottis for the treatment of various illnesses which is more rampant in the Northern part of Nigeria.

4. Herbal Medicine practitioners

Herbal medicine practitioners are known as herbalists. Practitioners of herbal medicine specialized only on the use of herbs such as plants' root, stem, leaves, pods etc in the treatment and management of various health issues. The type and quantity of herbal medicine to offer to a patient depend on the illness and application. Herbal medicine may be in the form of liquid or powder and the application may either be internal or external. In some cases, the powder is used for both internal and external application while the liquid is mostly used for internal application. In a recent development, herbalists in Nigeria are striving to standardize the formation and use of their products. They went to an extent of developing their products into standard such as syrups, tablets etc. It is because of this that National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (2006) is partnering with the majority of these herbalists in the country to ensure the regulation, production and use of products made of herbs. See below the list of some traditional medicines, manufacturers and approval status.

Drug	Manufacturer	tablet	capsule	liquid	Ointment	powder	NAFDAC status
Kabal S.C. Harbal Powder	Idlak(Nig)Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	04-8464L
Kabal S.C. Harbal mixture	Idlak(Nig)Ltd	-	-	✓	-	-	-
Datuma D.B. herbal Capsule(30x10g)	Idlak(Nig)Ltd	✓	-	✓	-	-	04-8209L
Datuma D.B. herbal Mixture	Idlak(Nig)Ltd	-	-	✓	-	-	-
Viracom(740mg)	Piecedove Pharmacist(Nig) Ltd.	✓	-	-	-	-	-
Pilopin	LifecareHolistic International	✓	-	-	-	-	✓
Vitron	LifecareHolistic International	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Enstone	LifecareHolistic International	-	-	-	✓	-	✓
PaxHerbalBK	PaxHerbalCenter	-	✓	-	-	-	A7-0773L
PaxHerbalLogotine	PaxHerbalCenter	-	✓	-	-	-	A7-0193L
PaxHerbalSkin Ointment	PaxHerbalCenter	-	-	-	✓	-	A7-0342L
PaxHerbalCough Syrup	PaxHerbalCenter	-	-	✓	-	-	04-7540L
Energy2000M&T	Yet-Kem International	-	-	✓	-	-	L
M&T	Yet-Kem International	-	-	✓	-	-	L
M2Formula	Yet-Kem International	-	-	✓	-	-	L

Source: NAFDAC (2011)

Benefits of Traditional Medicine in Nigeria

Even though modern medicine is highly advanced and well recognized for public health care delivery in almost all the countries of the world, the benefits of traditional medicine can never be underrated. Traditional medicine is a key to providing easy access to health care services more especially to poor people who cannot afford highly expensive modern drugs. Modern medical services and pharmaceutical drugs are becoming more expensive than the ordinary man cannot afford. Thus, evidence shows that there is increasing effectiveness of traditional medicine together with lower side effects. Many people see traditional medicine as safer than orthodox medicine simply because it is originally natural.

The effectiveness of traditional medicine for the treatment of different diseases has ascertained in several studies. Some serious illnesses such as cancer, diabetes etc for which orthodox medicine is weak are believed could be treated using traditional medicine. Because of this, Omoleke (2013) assert that practitioners of traditional medicine claim that since orthodox medicine cannot cure all diseases, they can intervene in such areas as social psychiatry, hypertension, diabetes, epilepsy and other psychosomatic illnesses where orthodox medicine is weak. For these simple reasons, the majority of populations in Nigeria are patronizing traditional medicine.

On the socio-economic benefit, traditional medicine as a field has impacted positively on the well being of its practitioners. Now that majority of people find it easy, safe, effective and affordable to patronize traditional medicine for health care, the market of herbal products is growing persistently and the gain is boosting. This made it possible for many more practitioners of traditional medicine to emerge. In any community you go to in Nigeria, you will find out that there many practitioners of traditional medicine who are well known and well to do.

Challenges of Traditional Medicine in Nigeria

It is indisputable fact that traditional medicine in Nigeria is associated with certain challenges even though it has a lot of benefits in different areas particularly in the health care system as the majority of the population in the country patronize it. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

1. Research and Development Issues

This is one of the major challenges of traditional medicine in Nigeria. The issue of research and development in the field of traditional medicine is faced with such setbacks as lack of training institutions for traditional medicine and funding. In Nigeria like other African countries, there is no one standard institution where knowledge and research of traditional medicine are being taught and promoted respectively. Most of the few schools where traditional medicine is taught are non-formal and not government-supported schools.

Funding is a key to any research and development but, it is an issue regarding research and development in the traditional healing system in Nigeria. This is because many people believe that since there is not a training institution of traditional medicine, research and development in the area is baseless.

2. Documentation Issues

The traditional healing system is traced with the creation of humanity and lack of proper documentation of its knowledge is also one of its major challenges. If you may ask any practitioner of traditional medicine in Nigeria how he/she acquire the knowledge, he/she will tell you that it was handed down to him/her by ancestors orally. The majority of these practitioners gained their knowledge in the family or at the community level from the elderly ones in most cases via conversations. This is why the literature on traditional medicine in Nigeria and almost all parts of the world is scarce. Having learnt the knowledge orally, these practitioners also do the same to younger ones who aim to become healers tomorrow. One funny thing about this is the fact that neither paper nor pen is used in the treatment and management of a patient as in prescriptions.

3. Ethical Issues

The lack of standardized nature of traditional medicine practices is another big challenge. The practices of traditional medicine in Nigeria vary from one community to another as there are no professional ethics binding the practices. Due to a lack of standards, a practitioner may treat two different patients having the same infection in different ways. This challenge creates variations in the way practitioners diagnose, treat and manage diseases in Nigeria.

4. Safety Issues

As the case in any country, the issue of safety about traditional medicine is still a huge challenge and a matter of serious concern in Nigeria. Many people express their concern regarding the safety of traditional medicine due to a lack of standard mode of practices ranging from diagnoses, prescriptions etc. World Health Organization (2001), reports that traditional medicine is far away from being able to meet the standards needed to back its use worldwide. The issue here is that there is scientific proof regarding the safety, quality and rational use of traditional medicine in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

The policy of Traditional Medicine in Nigeria

The Federal Government of Nigeria in 2007 through the Ministry of Health made a historic attempt and came up with a policy document to regulate and formalize the practices of traditional medicine in the country. The main purpose of the policy was to address relevant issues such as legislation and regulation; strategy system management; management information system; human resource development; technology; financing; conservation of the environment; biodiversity; knowledge; skills and culture; protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs) and indigenous knowledge; and fostering partnerships between traditional conventional practitioners. The policy sets to attain the following specific objectives.

1. To develop and facilitate the use of traditional medicine in Nigeria in the official health care system
2. To harness the potential and economic benefits of traditional medicine practice to accomplish the provisions of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)
3. To establish a country-specific institutional framework for traditional medicine

The policy document contained three major parts. Part one dwells on the background, objectives and goals of the policy.

Part two deals with the legislation and regulation of the practice of traditional medicine where it touches areas such as the establishment of codes of ethics and practice; promotion of traditional medicine through education and training; promotion of research and development; industrial development and production of traditional medicines; establishment of standards of safety, efficacy and quality for traditional medicine; conservation of biodiversity and preservation of indigenous traditional medicine knowledge; intellectual property rights (IPRs) and indigenous knowledge of traditional medicine; incorporation of traditional medicine into the existing national health care delivery etc.

Part three has to do with national traditional medicine strategy where it dwells on national traditional medicine strategy; national traditional medicine management system; the national managerial process; national traditional medicine management information system; national traditional medicine resources development; national traditional medicine technology; national traditional medicine research; conservation of the environment, biodiversity, knowledge, Skill and culture; classification of traditional medicine; international cooperation etc.

II. Conclusion

This review succeeded in highlighting the structure of traditional medicine in Nigeria. The paper discussed the nature of traditional medicine in Nigeria ranging from its forms, categories, benefits, challenges and policy. There are three categories of traditional medicine that include spiritualism, divination and physical healing. There are also such forms of traditional medicine as birth attendants, bone setting, traditional surgery and herbal medicine practitioners as the major ones. Some of the benefits of TM highlighted are the fact that it is easy to access, its effectiveness in treating such diseases as psychiatry, cancer etc for which orthodox medicine is weak and its socio-economic benefit to its practitioners. Thus, the major challenges of TM in Nigeria as reviewed include research and development issues, documentation issues, ethical issues and safety issues. The federal government of Nigeria came up with a policy on traditional medicine in Nigeria of which purpose is to address issues regarding regulation, production, research and development of traditional medicine and its integration into the official health care delivery system. The paper concluded that if the policy content is effectively implemented, traditional medicine practices and status in Nigeria will surely be fully part and parcel of the conventional health care delivery system.

III. Suggestions

Based on the major challenges of traditional medicine highlighted, the paper provided the following suggestions to strengthen and ensure the integration of traditional medicine into an official conventional system of health care delivery in the country.

1. The government of Nigeria since it mentioned the issue of education in the policy of traditional medicine should take care of training and re-training of practitioners of traditional medicine on modern techniques of diagnoses, prescriptions etc to standard and more conventional.
2. It was also provided in the policy that the government should address the issue of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). If this is well taken care of, the issue of documentation of traditional medicine valuable information will be addressed.
3. The government should also make sure it enforces the regulations governing the standards of traditional medicine practices in the country as enshrined in the policy of traditional medicine.
4. The government should equally make sure it enforces the provision of the policy of traditional medicine regarding safety, quality, efficacy and rational use of traditional medicine in Nigeria.

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