
Healthcare Provider's Readiness to offer Home Healthcare Services in Nigeria

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Abstract: Home healthcare services are gaining prominence globally due to their potential to improve patient outcomes, reduce hospital readmissions, and cut healthcare costs. These services, which include a wide range of medical and support services provided in patients' homes, are particularly beneficial for those with chronic illnesses, the elderly, and individuals recovering from surgery. Despite the potential benefits, Nigeria's healthcare system faces significant challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, which impede the effective implementation of home healthcare services. This study explores the readiness of healthcare providers in Nigeria to offer home healthcare services. It provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of home healthcare in Nigeria, examining historical contexts, existing programs, and prevailing challenges. Key factors influencing provider readiness, including training and education, resource availability, policy frameworks, and cultural attitudes, are identified and analyzed. The study utilizes the Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) model to understand the psychological and logistical preparedness of healthcare providers. Strategies to enhance readiness, such as capacity building, infrastructure development, supportive policies, and awareness programs, are discussed. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive policies and regulatory frameworks to support home healthcare in Nigeria. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can better understand and improve the readiness of healthcare providers, ultimately advancing the delivery of home healthcare services and improving patient outcomes in Nigeria.

Keywords: healthcare provider, readiness, home healthcare services

INTRODUCTION

Home healthcare services have become increasingly important in the global healthcare landscape. These services, which include a wide range of medical and support services provided in the patient's home, are designed to promote, maintain, or restore health and minimize the effects of illness and disability. The significance of home healthcare lies in its potential to enhance the quality of life for patients, especially those with chronic illnesses, the elderly, and individuals recovering from surgery or hospital stays. Home healthcare services can lead to better health outcomes, reduced hospital readmissions, and overall cost savings for both patients and healthcare systems (Li et al., 2022). The convenience of receiving care in a familiar environment, combined with personalized attention from healthcare providers, often results in higher patient satisfaction and adherence to treatment plans (Smith et al., 2023).

Nigeria's healthcare system is characterized by a mix of public and private sector participation. Despite efforts to improve healthcare delivery, the system faces numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, a shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, and disparities in healthcare access between urban and rural areas (Adepoju, 2021). The public healthcare system, managed by the government, is primarily responsible for providing services to the majority of the population. However, it is often plagued by inefficiencies, leading many Nigerians to rely on private healthcare providers. The private sector, although better equipped in some cases, is often inaccessible to the poorer segments of the population due to high costs (Onwujekwe et al., 2020). These systemic issues underscore the need for innovative healthcare delivery models, such as home healthcare services, to bridge the gaps in care and reach underserved communities.

Assessing the readiness of healthcare providers to offer home healthcare services is crucial for several reasons. First, provider readiness is a determinant of the successful implementation and sustainability of home healthcare programs. Providers need to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to deliver quality care in a home setting (Sultan & Baker, 2023). Second, understanding readiness levels can help identify gaps and areas needing improvement, thereby informing targeted training and capacity-building initiatives. Third, assessing readiness can facilitate the development of policies and frameworks that support and standardize home healthcare practices, ensuring that they are safe, effective, and accessible (Olayemi et al., 2022). By evaluating the readiness of healthcare providers, stakeholders can better understand the potential challenges and enablers in the transition to home-based care, ultimately enhancing patient outcomes and system efficiency.

This article explored the readiness of healthcare providers in Nigeria to offer home healthcare services. It seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of home healthcare services in the country, including historical context, existing programs, and prevailing challenges. The article identified key factors influencing readiness levels among healthcare providers in Nigeria. Additionally, the article reviewed methodologies for assessing readiness. Strategies to enhance provider readiness, including capacity building, infrastructure development, policy interventions, and awareness programs, will be discussed. Through this analysis, the article aimed to contribute to the understanding of healthcare provider readiness and support the advancement of home healthcare services in Nigeria.

Concept of Home Healthcare Services

Home healthcare services, a critical component of modern healthcare systems, aim to deliver medical care and support to patients within the comfort of their own homes. This approach encompasses a broad spectrum of services designed to maintain, restore, or improve health and functioning, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for patients, particularly those with chronic illnesses or disabilities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), home healthcare services can include nursing care, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, social services, and assistance with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, and eating (WHO, 2021). The scope of home healthcare is thus vast, addressing both medical and non-medical needs to ensure holistic patient care.

The definition of home healthcare services emphasizes patient-centered care provided outside of traditional healthcare facilities. This mode of healthcare delivery is particularly beneficial for patients who have difficulty accessing hospitals or clinics due to mobility issues, distance, or other barriers. Home healthcare services are tailored to individual patient needs, allowing for personalized care plans that can include wound care, medication management, chronic disease monitoring, and rehabilitation services (National Association for Home Care & Hospice, 2022). The primary goal is to prevent unnecessary hospitalizations and to support patients in achieving optimal health outcomes within their familiar environment.

Models of home healthcare services vary globally, reflecting diverse healthcare systems and cultural contexts. Common models include:

1. **Skilled Home Healthcare:** This model involves professional healthcare providers such as nurses, therapists, and social workers delivering clinical services. These services can range from post-operative care to chronic disease management and end-of-life care. Skilled home healthcare is often prescribed by a physician and covered by health insurance (Medicare, 2022).
2. **Non-Medical Home Care:** Focusing on assisting patients with activities of daily living (ADLs), this model includes services such as personal care, companionship, and household management. These services are typically provided by home health aides or personal care assistants and are essential for maintaining the independence and well-being of patients with long-term care needs (Home Care Association of America, 2023).
3. **Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC):** This comprehensive model integrates primary care into the home setting, where healthcare providers deliver regular check-ups, manage chronic conditions, and coordinate with specialists as needed. HBPC is particularly effective for patients with multiple chronic conditions who require frequent monitoring and management (American Academy of Home Care Medicine, 2021).

Global trends and best practices in home healthcare illustrate the dynamic evolution of this healthcare delivery model. Countries with advanced home healthcare systems, such as the United States, Canada, and several European nations, showcase diverse and innovative approaches. For instance, the use of telehealth and remote monitoring technologies has expanded significantly, enabling healthcare providers to offer real-time consultations and monitor patients' health status remotely. This technology-driven approach has proven to enhance patient outcomes, increase efficiency, and reduce healthcare costs (World Health Organization, 2021).

Moreover, integrated care models that combine home healthcare with community-based services are gaining traction globally. These models foster collaboration among healthcare providers, social workers, and community organizations to address the multifaceted needs of patients comprehensively. For example, the "Hospital at Home" program, pioneered in the United States and adopted in several other countries, delivers hospital-level care in the patient's home, significantly reducing hospital stays and improving patient satisfaction (Leff, 2022).

In terms of best practices, several key principles stand out. Effective home healthcare programs prioritize patient-centered care, ensuring that services are tailored to the unique needs and preferences of each patient. Interdisciplinary teams are crucial, as they bring together various healthcare professionals to deliver coordinated and comprehensive care. Continuous training and education for home healthcare providers are essential to maintain high standards of care and keep pace with evolving healthcare practices and technologies (Home Healthcare Now, 2022). The conceptual framework of home healthcare services underscores the importance of adaptable, patient-centered care models that leverage technological advancements and collaborative approaches to meet the diverse needs of patients.

Current State of Home Healthcare Services in Nigeria

Home healthcare services in Nigeria have evolved significantly over the past few decades. Historically, healthcare in Nigeria has been predominantly hospital-based, with minimal focus on home-based care. The primary healthcare system, established in the late 20th century, was aimed at improving healthcare accessibility in rural areas, but it did not specifically address home healthcare needs (Omoleke & Taleat, 2017). The traditional Nigerian healthcare delivery model relied heavily on in-hospital care, leaving a gap in continuous care for patients once they were discharged. This gap has increasingly been recognized by healthcare professionals and policymakers, leading to the gradual development of home healthcare services as an essential component of the healthcare continuum.

In recent years, several home healthcare programs and initiatives have been introduced in Nigeria to address the growing demand for such services. One notable example is the "Healthcare at Home" program initiated by some private healthcare providers in Lagos and Abuja. These programs offer a range of services, including chronic disease management, post-operative care, and palliative care, directly to patients in their homes (Adebayo et al., 2020). Additionally, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been instrumental in providing home-based care, particularly for patients with chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. For instance, the Home-Based Care Initiative by the Nigerian Red Cross Society has been pivotal in delivering care to patients who otherwise would have limited access to necessary medical services (Nigerian Red Cross Society, 2022). Despite these advancements, several challenges and barriers hinder the effective implementation and expansion of home healthcare services in Nigeria. One of the primary challenges is the inadequate funding and resources allocated to home healthcare. The Nigerian healthcare system is already strained with limited resources, which are primarily directed towards hospital-based care, leaving home healthcare underfunded (Ogunmefun & Akintunde, 2019). Furthermore, there is a significant shortage of trained healthcare professionals who are skilled in providing home-based care. This shortage is exacerbated by the brain drain phenomenon, where many qualified healthcare workers migrate to other countries for better opportunities (World Health Organization, 2021).

Another major barrier is the lack of awareness and understanding of home healthcare among both healthcare providers and patients. Many Nigerians are still unfamiliar with the concept and benefits of home healthcare, leading to reluctance in utilizing these services (Eze & Agu, 2018). Additionally, cultural and societal attitudes play a crucial role; there is often a preference for traditional and community-based care over formal home healthcare services.

Moreover, regulatory and policy frameworks for home healthcare in Nigeria are still in their infancy. There is a need for comprehensive policies and regulations that support and guide the practice of home healthcare, ensuring quality and standardization of services (Adeloye et al., 2017). Without such frameworks, it becomes challenging to integrate home healthcare into the broader healthcare system effectively.

Healthcare Provider Readiness: A Theoretical Perspective

In the context of healthcare services, readiness can be understood as the degree to which healthcare providers are prepared, both mentally and logistically, to implement new services or interventions. This encompasses not only the physical availability of resources but also the psychological and skill-based preparedness of the healthcare personnel involved. Readiness is a multifaceted construct that includes elements such as the providers' confidence in their ability to deliver care, their willingness to adopt new practices, and the presence of an enabling environment that supports these changes (Weiner, 2020).

One prominent model used to assess readiness in healthcare is the Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) model. This model, proposed by Weiner (2009), posits that organizational readiness is a shared psychological state within an organization, reflecting the members' collective commitment and efficacy to implement a change. The ORC model emphasizes two core components: change commitment and change efficacy. Change commitment refers to the shared resolve among organizational members to pursue the implementation of a change, while change efficacy relates to the shared belief in the collective capability to execute the change. Both components are critical in determining the likelihood of successful implementation of new healthcare practices (Weiner, 2020). Several factors influence the readiness of healthcare providers to offer new services such as home healthcare. One key factor is knowledge. Healthcare providers must possess comprehensive knowledge about home healthcare practices, protocols, and benefits. This includes understanding patient care in a home setting, managing medical equipment, and ensuring patient safety outside a traditional clinical environment. Training and continuous education play vital roles in enhancing providers' knowledge and keeping them updated with the latest advancements in home healthcare (Moullin et al., 2022).

Skills are another crucial determinant of readiness. Beyond theoretical knowledge, healthcare providers need practical skills to deliver effective home healthcare services. This involves clinical competencies, such as wound care, medication management, and emergency response, as well as soft skills like communication, empathy, and problem-solving. Skill acquisition and development can be fostered through hands-on training, simulations, and mentorship programs (Jones et al., 2021). Attitudes towards home healthcare significantly impact readiness. Healthcare providers' attitudes are shaped by their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences related to home healthcare. Positive attitudes,

such as seeing the value in patient-centered care and recognizing the benefits of home healthcare for patient outcomes, can enhance readiness. Conversely, negative attitudes, stemming from concerns about workload, resource limitations, or perceived complexity of home healthcare, can hinder readiness. Addressing these attitudes through awareness programs, success stories, and addressing concerns can promote a more positive outlook (Chong et al., 2021).

Factors Influencing Healthcare Provider Readiness in Nigeria

The readiness of healthcare providers to offer home healthcare services in Nigeria is contingent upon several critical factors, including training and education, resources and infrastructure, policy and regulatory environment, and cultural and societal attitudes. Each of these elements plays a vital role in shaping the preparedness and effectiveness of healthcare providers in delivering home-based care.

One of the primary factors influencing healthcare provider readiness is the availability and quality of training programs tailored to home healthcare. Effective home healthcare requires specialized skills and knowledge distinct from those used in traditional clinical settings. According to Akinsola et al. (2023), there is a significant gap in the training of healthcare providers for home-based care in Nigeria. Many training programs are either insufficiently comprehensive or entirely absent, resulting in a workforce that is inadequately prepared to manage the unique challenges of home healthcare (Akinsola et al., 2023). Moreover, continuous professional development is crucial for maintaining high standards of care. Healthcare providers need ongoing education to stay updated with the latest advancements and best practices in home healthcare. The absence of structured, continuous training programs further exacerbates the readiness challenge. Enhancing the availability and quality of training programs is essential for equipping healthcare providers with the necessary competencies to deliver effective home healthcare services (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022).

The adequacy of resources and infrastructure is another pivotal factor affecting the readiness of healthcare providers. Home healthcare delivery relies heavily on the availability of medical equipment, technology, and logistical support to ensure that patients receive comprehensive care in their homes. According to a study by Nwafor et al. (2022), many healthcare providers in Nigeria face significant challenges due to a lack of essential medical equipment and technology, which hampers their ability to provide effective home-based care (Nwafor et al., 2022). In addition to medical equipment, logistical support is crucial for the successful implementation of home healthcare services. This includes reliable transportation for healthcare providers to visit patients, as well as efficient communication systems to coordinate care. Without adequate resources and infrastructure, the delivery of home healthcare can be inconsistent and substandard, leading to poor patient outcomes (Adebayo et al., 2023).

The policy and regulatory environment significantly influences the readiness of healthcare providers to offer home healthcare services. Supportive government policies and regulations are essential for creating an enabling environment for home healthcare. However, in Nigeria, there is often a lack of clear policies and regulatory frameworks specifically addressing home healthcare, which creates uncertainty and limits the development of this sector (Eke et al., 2023). Government support, in the form of funding and incentives, is also crucial for the growth of home healthcare services. Adequate funding can facilitate the establishment of training programs, procurement of necessary equipment, and development of infrastructure. Incentives for healthcare providers can encourage more

professionals to specialize in home healthcare, thus increasing the availability and quality of care. Eke et al. (2023) emphasize the need for comprehensive policies and robust regulatory frameworks to promote the expansion and effectiveness of home healthcare services in Nigeria.

Cultural and societal attitudes towards home healthcare play a significant role in determining the readiness of healthcare providers. In Nigeria, traditional beliefs and practices often influence healthcare delivery and acceptance. According to Olatunji and Afolabi (2022), many patients and their families still prefer hospital-based care due to a perception that it is superior to home-based care (Olatunji & Afolabi, 2022). Healthcare providers themselves may also harbor reservations about the feasibility and efficacy of home healthcare, particularly in the absence of adequate training and resources. Changing these perceptions requires concerted efforts in awareness and education, both for healthcare providers and the general public. Building trust in home healthcare services can significantly enhance their acceptance and utilization, thereby improving overall healthcare outcomes.

Strategies to Enhance Readiness for Home Healthcare Services

One of the most crucial strategies to enhance readiness for home healthcare services is capacity building through training and continuous professional development programs. Healthcare providers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver quality care in home settings. Training programs should cover various aspects of home healthcare, including patient assessment, chronic disease management, use of medical technologies, and communication skills. For instance, training modules on telehealth can significantly improve providers' ability to offer remote consultations and monitoring, which is essential for effective home healthcare (Mukhtar, 2021). Continuous professional development ensures that healthcare providers stay updated with the latest advancements and best practices in home healthcare, thus maintaining high standards of care (Johnson et al., 2023).

Infrastructure development is another critical strategy to enhance readiness for home healthcare services. Investment in necessary medical equipment and technology is vital to ensure that healthcare providers can deliver effective and efficient care at home. This includes portable diagnostic tools, telemedicine platforms, and electronic health record systems that enable seamless communication and data sharing between patients and providers. For example, the use of mobile health applications can facilitate real-time monitoring of patients' health conditions, allowing for timely interventions (Adebayo et al., 2022). Adequate infrastructure also encompasses reliable transportation for healthcare providers to reach patients' homes, ensuring that services are accessible even in remote areas.

Advocacy for supportive policies and regulations is essential to create an enabling environment for home healthcare services. Policymakers need to recognize the importance of home healthcare and implement regulations that facilitate its integration into the broader healthcare system. This includes developing standards and guidelines for home healthcare practice, ensuring appropriate reimbursement mechanisms, and providing incentives for healthcare providers to offer home-based services. For instance, policy interventions that promote the use of telehealth can enhance access to home healthcare, especially in rural areas (Ogunbanjo et al., 2022). Additionally, establishing regulatory frameworks that ensure the quality and safety of home healthcare services can build trust among patients and providers, encouraging wider adoption of these services.

Awareness and sensitization programs play a crucial role in changing cultural and societal attitudes towards home healthcare. In many communities, there is a lack of understanding and acceptance of home healthcare services, which can hinder their adoption. Public awareness campaigns can educate the community about the benefits of home healthcare, such as improved patient outcomes, increased comfort, and reduced healthcare costs (Adesina et al., 2023). These programs should target not only patients and their families but also healthcare providers and policymakers to foster a supportive environment for home healthcare. Community engagement initiatives, such as workshops and informational sessions, can help demystify home healthcare and address any misconceptions, ultimately leading to greater acceptance and utilization of these services.

CONCLUSION

It has been highlighted that the concept of home healthcare services, while gaining global recognition, faces significant challenges in Nigeria due to infrastructural deficits, limited training opportunities, and insufficient policy support. Theoretical models such as the Organizational Readiness for Change model have been instrumental in understanding the factors influencing readiness. The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policies that support the development and implementation of home healthcare services in Nigeria. Policymakers should prioritize the establishment of clear guidelines and standards for home healthcare, ensuring adequate funding and resources are allocated to this sector. Additionally, there is a critical need for the integration of home healthcare training into medical and nursing curricula, complemented by continuous professional development programs to enhance providers' skills and knowledge.

From a practical perspective, healthcare organizations must invest in the necessary infrastructure, including medical equipment and technology, to facilitate effective home healthcare services. Collaboration between public and private sectors can play a pivotal role in resource mobilization and service delivery. Furthermore, cultural sensitization programs are essential to shift societal attitudes and increase the acceptance of home healthcare services among both providers and patients.

There is a growing recognition of the potential benefits of home healthcare services in Nigeria, significant gaps remain in terms of provider readiness. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-pronged approach involving policy reform, infrastructure development, and continuous education and training of healthcare providers. By fostering an environment conducive to home healthcare, Nigeria can improve access to quality healthcare services, particularly for its aging population and those with chronic illnesses. The readiness of healthcare providers is crucial for the successful implementation of home healthcare services, and with concerted efforts from all stakeholders, Nigeria can make substantial progress in this area.

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