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HEALTH INFORMATION  
LITERACY (HIL) AND  
CONTROL OF STUDENTS'  
PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL  
PROBLEMS: THE LIBRARIAN  
IN PARTNERSHIP



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**ABSTRACT**

*Nigerians are generally bereft of the ability to understand and utilise health information to make useful health decisions. As a result, there is a gap in the awareness of web-based health resources. Therefore, to bridge this gap, health sciences librarians must collaborate with health professionals and health-care providers to advocate ways that could make students better informed in taking better health choices in a bid to control psychopathological problems. This paper examined Health information literacy and its effectiveness in the control of psychopathological problems for the attainment of educational goals. Health information literacy as a concept has to do with a student's recognition of the need for health information, exerting and exploring efforts to get these information and its actually utilisation in solving practical problems. Therefore health information skills needed by students in order to draw from the vast pool of health information resources was discussed, ways through which a librarian can partner with health professionals, health care providers, the faculty and educators in the control of psychopathological problems in students for effective educational goals and the implication of such partnerships were highlighted. The librarian's role in health information literacy delivery process in a bid to control psychopathological problems was also discussed and recommendations were made to include the designing of HIL skills programme curriculum for secondary and tertiary education students, in order to increase their ability to identify, locate, evaluate and utilise authentic health information from health information websites.*



# INTRODUCTION

**M**ost Nigerians seem to lack the awareness and ability to understand and utilize the information they need to make good health decisions, especially as it relates to psycho-pathological problems of the Nigerian child. Librarians are therefore committed to collaborate with others to increase health literacy by fostering among health professionals and educators an understanding of the role that HIL plays in empowering people to read, understand and act on health information. Consequently, this paper will define and frame HIL within two larger but related concepts; Health literacy and Information literacy.

Information Literacy is a set of competencies that enables individuals to recognize the need for information and have the ability to locate, evaluate and utilise the needed information effectively (ACRL, 2000). Therefore Information Literacy is ultimately a means to achieving lifelong educational goal as it enables individuals make informed decisions based on critical reasoning and thinking. Through information literacy, other literacies can be achieved (Etim, 2007).

On the other hand, Health Literacy which is a subset of Information Literacy relates to the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. Health literacy ultimately contributes to a healthy lifestyle, a healthy and informed mind capable of utilising health information for lifelong decision-making. Hsu, Johnson & Brooks (2003) define literacy as addressing the acquisition of information when needed, assessment of information with scientific facts and expert advice as the knowledge-based strategies leading to informed decisions such as the choice of a healthy lifestyle.

Health literacy is not necessarily schooling or the ability to read. In this technological age, individuals must put up concerted efforts at improving health care and reducing cost and taking an active role in their health related decisions, especially psychological disorders that can hinder educational performance. This of course, may be achieved through the acquisition of Health Information skills.

### **Health Literacy Skills Needed for the Control of Psychopathological Problems**

Psychopathology may be to be the manifestation of psychological disorders in children, adolescents and young adults. A significant number of students are affected by psychopathological conditions. However, prevalence rates vary widely, depending on the age group, type of disorder and method of assessment. Oppositional defiant disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and pervasive developmental disorder are examples of psychological problems affecting children and adolescents. Patients are often faced with complex information and treatment decisions. Some of the specific tasks patients are required to carry out include:

- Evaluating information for credibility and quality,
- Calculating dosages,
- Interpreting test results, or
- Locating health information

The two definitions above have given a basis for the meaning of HIL which (MLA, 2011) defines as a “set of abilities needed to recognize health information need, identify likely information source and use them to retrieve relevant information, assess quality of the information and its applicability to a specific situation, analyse, understand and use information to assess the health information and retrieve same for use by individuals who are in need of such information”.

However, the following skills are required by adolescents in order to be HI Literate

- Visual literacy
- Computer literacy
- Information literacy
- Numerical literacy
- Oral language literacy or articulatory literacy.

Computer literacy and Information literacy are not mutually exclusive. Thus Scloman (2001) viewed computer literacy to be a set of competencies represented by being able to understand computer basics and use a variety of applications to manipulate data and create documents. This is to say that a student can be proficient at using the computer but does not know the skill sets necessary for achieving lifelong learning through electronic information. Therefore, computer-related skills often serve however, to enable information related activities Scloman (2001). While computer-related literacy is a means to achieving an end, information literacy can be considered as the actual end and it is broader in scope.

## Health Information Competencies for Students

Competencies are knowledge and skill sets essential for accomplishing any set goal. However, the proliferation of health information does not always transform into informed choices. Health information competencies are simply finding quality information on a specific health topic. Such competencies could be linked to locating sources of information, navigating health information online databases, evaluating the quality of health information got and utilizing it appropriately. Health Information competencies maybe categorized under the following: sourcing for information, evaluating the information got and the actual utilization of the health information.

The presence of ICT has given everyone access to a vast pool of information which will be beneficial to students if they can subject it to careful scrutiny and evaluation. Thus, Health information competencies may simply be required to improve access to health information through the computer. This paper therefore aims at addressing how proficient students are at finding and evaluating sources of health related information and how aware they are of their level of health information competencies.

Secondary and higher education institutions in Nigeria should provide access to varied quantity of digital information through library archives, licensed online databases, and the public-access internet. Critics have however questioned the quality of health information in the public-access internet. Thus, students with limited information competencies may locate shallow and superficial information because of employing poor search strategies. Students should demonstrate their competencies through database navigation skills by conducting advanced searches using Boolean operators ('and', 'or' and 'not').

Health information competencies required by students may be classified as follows:

The ability to access and acquire information

The ability to evaluate the quality of H I Resources (HIR)

Ability to conduct advanced information search aimed at specification of topics (concepts) required not generalization

Ability to access the validity or (reliability) relevance of health information source.

Ability to understand the merits and demerits of the various media providing health information.

## **The Librarian as Advocate and Partner in the Control of Psychopathological Problems**

In this era of information exploration, the librarian (school, academic or public) can collaborate with psychologists, health educators and parents, to foster HIL thereby controlling psychopathological problems for effective educational performances of students in Nigeria. All types of libraries can embrace this as important advocacy and partnership rights, which they can contribute to the educational development in Nigeria. This is to say that Health information literacy should be made a practical framework for the establishment of standards and measurable outcomes in both healthcare practice and the practice of librarianship as well. Since libraries are viewed to be natural laboratories for learning these competencies, and librarians are experienced facilitators in teaching students the skills needed for access, retrieval, evaluation, and appropriate use of information (Scloman 2001), academic institutions across the country should seek ways to partner with classroom faculty to further information literacy efforts within a given curricula. Most studies (Weaver, 1993; Fox, Richter & White, 1989; Hodson-Carlton & Dorner) seem to agree with the fact that these health advocacy initiatives develop in students, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Health sciences librarians can collaborate with the following to enhance Health Information Literacy (HIL) in students.

Literacy-based groups (basic education centres, English as a second language (ESSL)

- Health Organizations
- Public and Private Schools
- Public libraries
- Academic libraries
- Hospitals
- Educational and cultural organizations

The health librarian in partnership can do the following to curb Psychopathological disorders in students:

Develop partnerships with school librarians, health education teachers, science teachers and school nurses, to infuse health information literacy into the curriculum.

Organize health information seminars by collaborating with educational and cultural organizations.

Partner with basic education centres and infuse health related information into their programmes.

Organize workshops at the public libraries to teach health information competencies.

Collaborate with hospital administrators and healthcare providers to champion the library course by providing health information literacy and health information services.

Train partners to increase knowledge on the importance of health information and usage of health information database like Medline plus.

Partner with healthcare providers to enlighten the populace on health information literacy issues, the importance of health literacy and the challenges student patients face in understanding medical terminologies, health information resources and the health information literacy services available.

### **Implications of Partnerships in the Control of Psychopathological Problems**

Health information services and resources offered by librarians can go a long way in improving the health information literacy skills of healthcare providers and psychopathological problems in students, therefore:

Librarians' involvement in health information literacy increases the profession's public recognition and perceived value.

Librarians' involvement in the curriculum enhances healthcare providers' knowledge of health information literacy, health information and referral of psychopathological patients to the library for necessary additional assistance.

### **The Librarian's role in Health Information Literacy Delivery Process**

Library and information science is a discipline, which cuts across all fields of study. HIL as a field is much more relevant to the Library and Information Science

discipline because the librarian is concerned with providing and making students literate in Health Information Resources and the skills needed to maximally explore and utilize this health information.

These skills as it relates to information literacy include:

Identifying a health problem

Executing ways to find the health information such as searching through electronic information resources.

Ascertaining ways of getting the required health information sources such as print, audio-visual, and computerized resources.

Utilization of relevant health information that involves an individual's screening of these information sources to ascertain which is relevant.

Organizing and analyzing health information to solve practical health



problems.

The librarian's role in Health Information Literacy process delivery in the control of psychopathological problems is presented in the Table below:

**Table 1: The Librarian and Health Information Literacy Delivery.**

<b>Information Literacy Skills</b>	<b>The Librarian in the Delivery Process</b>
Task definition	Let students choose any health topic with any letter of the alphabet. Ask students why they need the particular health information especially as it has to do with them. Guide them to particular sources of health information in journals, literature.
Information seeking strategies	Teach students to select resources best suited to the students' health need whether printed, electronic, published or unpublished.
Locate and access	Teach students to use the library catalogue(s) in a bid to access health information resources. Teach them to use Boolean Operators (that is, AND, OR, NOT) to link the search terms when searching online database for easy retrieval.
Use	Teach students new ways of connecting and operating information technology with a view to accessing health information. Teach them the process; give guides and manuals associated with such tasks.
Synthesis	Teach them to organize, analyse and communicate information using database or spreadsheet.
Evaluation	Teach them to form guided queries in an attempt to appraise the quality of health information. Such guided queries should include author, content, authority, currency and accessibility

**Web Sources of Health Information**

There are various sources of information on health information. The increase in the application of internet technology has provided at least four (4) major general sources of health information, namely;

- commercial services
- online mailing lists
- internet newsgroups (USENET), and
- the world wide web

The specific sources of Health Information with credibility include:

**1. Hinari** (Health Inter-network Access to Research Initiatives): Hinari, was set up by the World Health Organisation in collaboration with major publishers with the aim of enabling developing countries like Nigeria to gain access to the world's largest

collection of electronic biomedical and health literature. 3280 journal articles made available to about 133 countries and Nigerian institutions are eligible for free access, through (<http://www.healthinternetnetwork.net>; Etim, 2007).

**2. Opendoar:** Directory of Open Access Repositories. This is a networked environment for information discovery and retrieval through ([www.opendoar.org](http://www.opendoar.org) or [www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org)).

**3. Medlars:** This is an acronym for Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval Services. This is a collection of databases maintained and leased to libraries and research institutions by the National Library of Medicine (NLM)

**4. Medline:** This was created and maintained by the National Library of Medicine. It is the largest Bibliographic database in the world, which indexes the literature of biomedical sciences. It embraces Index Medicus, Index to Dental Literature and International Nursing. According to Reitz (2005), it contains over 11 million bibliographic records representing articles indexed since 1996 from over 3,900 journals, and monographs published as the result of biomedical congresses and symposia. Medline is a HIL source with extensive coverage of biological and physical sciences, allied health, humanities, and information science in relation to medicine and healthcare, communication disorders, population biology and reproductive biology.

**5. Medline Plus:** Also, this freely accessed source incorporates Medline and quality, up-to-date drug information, encyclopaedia, directories and clinical trials. The National Library of Medicine (NLM) provides the access.

**6. Bioferrorism Portal:** This website provides specific public health interest. The University of North Carolina has provided a toolbox website as health information repository.

### Conclusion

Nigerians are generally bereft of the ability to understand and utilise health information to make useful health decisions. Health professionals, health care providers, educators, parents and patients face difficulties and frustrations in coping with the wealth of available information in a way that results in informed health care decisions that will better control psychopathological problems of students. Librarians are therefore committed to collaborating with health professionals, health care providers and educators to increase health literacy and enlighten adolescent students on the role that health information literacy plays in equipping students to read, understand and utilise it for solving practical health problems. This will invariably go a long way in making them well informed and healthy in the realisation of set educational goals through modelling of their behaviour towards socially acceptable standards.

### **Recommendations**

i) Librarians can introduce health information in their communities as well as community schools by collaborating and dialoguing with community organisations with common interests in addressing important health issues. By so doing, they could develop fun and learning programmes that expose students to an interaction with their learning environment.

ii) Health sciences or Medical librarians could partner with Nigerian Medical Association, museum librarians, public librarians, public health employees and college faculty members and students to introduce programmes that will develop Health Information Literacy skills which will in turn address health-related questions in today's electronic age.

iii) Health sciences librarians could design a simplified HIL skills programme curriculum which will focus primarily on improving students' abilities at identifying, locating, evaluating, and utilising health information from health information websites. Such a curriculum could be adopted or adapted by any type of library, information centre or community based organisation.

iv) Health sciences or Medical librarians could involve in Current Awareness Services (which could promote health literacy among health professionals), sponsor health literacy seminars (to discuss ways to use HIL to control psychopathological problems in students) and collaborate with health-based organisations.

v) Health sciences Librarians could develop methodologies and materials for the actual implementation of the curriculum so designed as this will better educate students on ways to evaluate health information resources, especially those found on the internet.

vi) Librarians could organise health information literacy classes at the public library to teach adolescent patrons health related topics.

Librarians could liaise with the Nigerian Medical Association and health professionals to create authentic web portals of health information.

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