Chapter 16
Perceptions of Medical and Nursing Staff Towards Electronic Records at Selected Private Health Institutions in Zimbabwe

Beauty Masceline Makiwa

 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1588-1966

Three Dreamers Enterprises, Zimbabwe

Blessing Chiparausha

 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0583-6945

Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study sought to find the types of electronic records that are used at selected private health institutions in Zimbabwe and establish the perceptions of medical and nursing staff towards the electronic records. The study also examined the challenges that are faced by private health institutions' medical and nursing staff when using electronic records, and some solutions to these challenges were proffered. Purposive sampling was used to select institutions that participated in the study. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from medical and nursing staff from the selected institutions. The study confirms that medical and nursing staffs' perceptions towards electronic records are positive, but knowledge about and usage of electronic records are relatively in their infancy at the private health institutions studied. However, uptake of electronic records is significantly going up as the institutions grapple to match global standards.

INTRODUCTION

Just like public health institutions, private health instructions are equally important in the provision of healthcare services in any country. The provision of heath care services is an important sector thus records generated during the daily transactions taking place at these institutions must be preserved for the benefit of that private heath institution's own good and for the benefit of public especially the national health system. The world now heavily depends on information and communication technologies (ICTs) in service provision and knowledge generation and preservation. This has seen health institutions generating, receiving, processing and storing lots of records in electronic format. Despite their unique nature, electronic records are part of the essential records management universe together with records in physical format. Considering the important role electronic records play in healthcare services, the study sought to establish how private health institutions in Zimbabwe were providing services vis-à-vis the usage electronic records by their medical and nursing staff.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted on the perceptions of various professionals towards electronic records. For instance, Graser (2011) carried out a study on the acceptance of electronic medical records by Canadian forces where he found out that adoption of electronic records was low despite the benefits electronic records could bring. Veer and Francke (2009) report that nursing staff acknowledged that electronic records facilitated improved healthcare although there would be increased costs of medical care following the adoption of electronic records. Porter (2013) laments the slow adoption of electronic records by doctors and other caregivers and Dimitrovski (2013) concurs and reports that healthcare professionals were reluctant to adopt electronic health records (EHRs) in their daily practice. On the contrary, Kirshbaum (2008) conducted a study in the United Kingdom (UK) where she found out that most of the participants in her study demonstrated positive attitudes towards EHRs. Similar findings are reported by O'Malley, Berry and Sharp (2010) who conducted a study on the acceptance of EHRs by health professionals in Ireland.

In a study conducted by Shaw, et al. (2011) it was found out that even though medical personnel were using electronic medical records in their practice, the medical personnel reported that they were realising very few benefits out of the electronic records. The study also reveals that participants lacked financial and human resource support to effectively utilise the electronic records. However, a study by Moody, et al. (2004) shows that health personnel were in favour of using EHRs because they resulted in decreased workload. Msukwa (2011) conducted a similar study in Malawi where it was found out that health personnel preferred using electronic medical records to paper records because the former enabled efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

There are various types of electronic records that could be used by medical and nursing staff. First, it is important to provide some definition of what an electronic record is. The Florida Department of State (2010) defines an electronic record as any information that is recorded in machine readable form. Examples of electronic records include numeric, audio, graphic, video and textual information that is recorded or transmitted in analog or digital format. Such records include spreadsheets, word processing files, databases, electronic mail, instant messages, scanned images, digital photographs and multimedia files.

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