THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN HUMAN HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE DELIVERY

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ABSTRACT
Psychology is a biological, social, cognitive and evidence-based discipline that seeks to understand human behaviours in settings (homes, schools and workplaces), developmental stages (childhood, adolescence and geriatric), gender (male and female), domains (biological, social and cognitive) and states (normal and abnormal). The branches of psychology -clinical, developmental, community, and health, have become more intimately involved in addressing societal problems, and its integration in human activities is considered to have ascribed humans with the “real person” status. Similarly, its foundation in health and illness, has defined the mind-body relationship upon which the psychological treatment methods were developed. This article therefore, x-rays the origin of psychology and its roles in various human endeavours, especially in healthcare delivery, while also expounding the importance of its inclusion in the training of medical and allied professionals towards achieving a balanced practice.

Key words: Psychology, behaviour, biopsychosocial, healthcare,

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INTRODUCTION
Psychology is as old as man but its origin cannot be easily pinpointed. It is believed to have originated from the natural sciences and the field of philosophy. However, it’s scientific and laboratory foundation as a formal discipline was laid by Wilhelm Wundt at the University of Leipzig in Germany (Fahrenberg, 2012). Wilhelm was interested in both philosophical and physiological questions and consequently advocated a range of methodological approaches to collecting evidence (Fahrenberg, 2011; 2012). His methods included the use of scientific experiments and ethnography (Wundt, 1874; 1896; 1907; 1921; Fahrenberg, 2011).

In broad terms, psychology can be described as a social, biological, cognitive and evidenced-based discipline that focuses on human behaviours; with applications in health and illness due to its sole focus of understanding, analyzing, measuring, predicting and modifying human behaviours (Meischner-Metge, 2006; Wontorra, 2009; Reber, 1995). It is a field concerned with the totality of what makes us human (Rogoff et al., 1984) and according to Taylor (2003), psychology can best be described as the profession concerned with enhancing human effectiveness.

Another line of thought, opine that psychology studies man’s behaviour in states (normal and abnormal), developmental stages (across lifespan from birth to death), sex (male and female), settings (home, workplace, and school) and domains (biological, social and cognitive). As such, it is interested in man’s behavioural changes and adjustments and combines advances in biology and social sciences in a unique way to solve human problems (Weingart et al., 1997). The recognized mind-body relationship (Fahrenberg, 1979; Hoche, 2008) has also metamorphosed into psychosomatic medicine and has given rise to biopsychosocial models of healthcare which arguably, has immensely influenced healthcare services in several ways.

Interestingly, psychology as a field of study has produced a large number of well trained practitioners who toil and expend substantial portion of their professional lives, practicing psychotherapy and other types of psychological and behavioral interventions. Its diverse, multi-perspective nature of psychology has been estimated to have contributed immensely towards the understanding of organizational behaviour in management science, the science of psychiatry, and caring professions like nursing science. This partly mirrors the influential work of the four ‘founders’ of psychology -Charles Darwin, Wilhelm Wundt, William James and Sigmund Freud, who were credited to have raised psychological questions first as philosophers and increasingly as biologists, physiologists and medical scientists (Bergman, 2010).

Globally, psychological societies are responsible for the regulation, training and practice of psychology; having collectively endorsed an ethical guideline for the conduct of practitioners in the practice of psychology (Allan and Love, 2010). As such, all qualified psychologist are by obligation,
expected to abide by the ethical guidelines (Allan and Love, 2010).

Psychology is also increasingly concerned with issues that are relevant to people's everyday life as its practical and professional applications are important in several areas of human endeavour. This explains the basis for psychologists serving as advisors, consultants or therapists in a range of settings especially educational institutions, workplaces, sports and mental health facilities, but specific areas of increasing practical concern include dyslexia, stress, autism and police interrogation strategies (APA, 2006).

Undoubtedly, psychology is useful in all fields of human endeavour including arts and humanities, communication, business and management, health and allied fields, engineering and allied fields (Wickens and Hollands, 1999). More notably, psychology has found relevance in several areas such clinical and counseling psychology, social and cross-cultural psychology, health psychology, and behavioural medicine (APA, 2006). These sub-clinical fields have advanced the development of various health care models and treatment interventions.

This article therefore, seeks to elucidate and emphasize the role of psychology in modern healthcare delivery, while expounding the importance of its inclusion in the training of medical and allied professionals towards achieving a balanced practice.

**PSYCHOLOGY IN HEALTH AND ILLNESS**

The field of psychology has obviously sharpened the definition of health as a complex state of physical, social and mental well being of an individual and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Ryan and Deci, 2001). This definition maintains that health and illness are caused by multiple factors and produce multiple effects (Myers et al., 2000). Thus, one can achieve a good state of health through attention to biological, psychological and social needs, rather than something that is taken for granted (WHO, 1948). The psychological models 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 (Coulter, 1993; Donatelle et al., 1999; ). It also makes explicit the significance of the relationship between patient and practitioners. According to Belar (1997), an effective patient participation can improve patient’s health care and the efficacy of treatment strategies, as well as the rapidity with which illness is resolved.

On the other hand, psychology focuses attention on health promotion and maintenance, including how to get children to develop good health habits (Child psychology and psychopathology); how to promote regular exercise; and how to design a media campaign to get people improve their diets and behaviour (Health Psychology), while also examining lifespan associated health and psychological disorders (Lifespan developmental psychology and Psychopathology) (APA office on Aging, 2011). It also studies special populations like the elderly in geriatric psychology and psychopathology, while its involvement towards understanding human behaviour in normal and abnormal states, has provided psychology with the knowledge to prevent illnesses and promote/improve health, thereby playing an important role in the aspect of prevention and treatment of illnesses (APA office on Aging, 2011).

In practice, psychologists have been able to teach people in high-stress prone occupations how to manage stress effectively. They focus on the etiology and correlate of health, illness and dysfunctions, and attempt to improve the health care system while formulating appropriate health policies. In this regard, psychologist have developed a variety of short-term behaviour interventions to address a wide variety of health related problems including managing pain, modifying bad and unacceptable health habits and managing the side effect or treatment effects associated with a range of chronic diseases (APA office on Aging, 2011). Worthy of note is the fact that psychological techniques also targets risk factors like smoking and such efforts can lead to the decline in the incidence of some diseases (Satomura and Nakahara, 2003). Psychologists have as well observed that informing patients about the procedures and sensations involved in unpleasant medical surgical procedures does improve their adjustment, cooperation with practitioners, and recovery (Wahass, 2005).

Many have wondered how biological, social and psychological variables interact towards determining the status of health and illness. To resolve such puzzles, researchers have adopted the system theory approach to health; maintaining that all level of organization in any entity are linked to each other (Renger et al. 2000; Sackney et al., 2000). This means that the micro level processes (such as cellular changes) are nested within the macro level processes (such as societal values) and that changes in the micro level can have micro level effects (and vice-versa) (Adams et al., 1997).

**PSYCHOLOGY IN HEALTHCARE DELIVERY**

Healthcare can be positively described in at least two ways namely: as a personal service that is humane, respectful, and patient focused; and as a business that is high tech, labour intensive, market oriented and diversified, with goals to improve the health of individuals, while offering community based programmes to enhance the quality of life.

About 30 years ago, hospitals were thought to be places where people primarily go to die (Noyes 2000) and our grandparents still think of hospitals in terms of dying. The hospital has always fascinated social scientists because its function are so many and varied; being a custodial unit, a group, a treatment center, a teaching center, and a research and laboratory center. Nowadays, healthcare delivery in Nigeria is switching to
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In a 10 year report, it was shown that the number of individuals for most practicing psychologists of physical disorders. These components reflect the core focus of manifesting psychopathology or psychological components generally referred to as "consultation and administration. The practice of what is assessment, teaching, clinical supervision, research, community psychology provider, especially its branches that deals directly with health care utilization surely benefits the patient and the healthcare Psychology's integration into the health sector and its effective involvement of psychology has brought about changes and development in health care delivery as regards the nature of patient-provider communication and patient-provider attitude and perception; there influencing overall performance and patients adherence to provider's regimen.

The advances in psychology has also enabled healthcare providers to create a conducive, interacting and therapeutic atmosphere that heals, comfort and allow clients to interact and communicate with their healthcare providers. The man who is the patient is termed a complex biosocial perceptual organism. He is a biological organism, a social organism that compares himself to others, and a perceptual organism who interprets stimuli in the environment, so he has a self esteem, pride and dignity which must be respected. Surely, the increasing involvement of psychology has brought about changes and development in health care delivery as regards the nature of patient-provider communication and patient-provider attitude and perception; there influencing overall performance and patients adherence to provider’s regimen.

THE ADVANTAGES

Psychology’s integration into the health sector and its effective utilization surely benefits the patient and the healthcare provider, especially its branches that deals directly with health care delivery include clinical psychology, counseling psychology, rehabilitation psychology, health psychology and community psychology. In the health sector these areas of psychology serves for therapy and interventions, diagnosis and assessment, teaching, clinical supervision, research, consultation and administration. The practice of what is generally referred to as “psychotherapy” is directed to different manifestation of psychopathology or psychological component of physical disorders. These components reflect the core focus for most practicing psychologist.

In a 10 year report, it was shown that the number of individuals under treatment for depression from 1987-1997 increased significantly, while the number of individuals who used antidepressant medicine increased as against the declined proportion of those who received psychotherapy. Specifically, the proportion of patients who received outpatient psychotherapy for depression by a physician rose from 68.9% to 87.3%, while the proportion treated by psychologists declined from 29.8% to 19.1% (Olsson et al., 2002).

ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

Barlow (2004) asserted that the major obstacles to the non inclusion of psychologist into developing health care systems includes existing stigmas against mental disorders or psychological aspects of physical disorders. The effects of this labeling or stigma have led to diverse behaviours towards victims especially those with psychological/ mental disorder; thus making the conditions grow worse before efforts are made. It has also led to the immediate abandonment of patients or individuals, who display psychological/mental symptoms, leading to psychological morbidity as the affected individuals are isolated, abandoned and made to suffer and deteriorate; further amplifying the traditional beliefs about mental illness.

It is interesting to note that although there is still much to learn, the available evidence does show that psychological interventions are an effective, if not more effective, than extant pharmacological treatment or alternative psychotherapeutic procedures when evaluated in the context of specific disorders. Meanwhile, several studies have demonstrated the success of psychological treatment for stress incontinence in women when compared with medication or alternative therapies both immediately after the end of treatment as well as follow up (Bargo et al.1998; Goode et al. 2003). Another study had also demonstrated the efficacy of psychological treatment compared with medication or placebo for insomnia, both after treatment and a follow up (Morin et al., 1999).

In 2003, a very important study demonstrated that psychological and behavioural interventions, substantially improves depression and physical health and tended to delay institutionalization in a community study of Alzheimers disease (Turi et al., 2003). Such report shows that when properly designed, psychological treatments can be used to manage specific pathologies. In fact, specifically emerging psychological treatment strategies from different theoretical persuasions have proven to be efficacious when compared with alternative treatments. The strategies are specifically tailored to pathological process that is causing impairment and distress in patients via the incorporation of knowledge acquired from cognitive and behavioural science with strong input from the field of social psychology and interpersonal processes.

CONCLUSION

Psychology is indeed an integral part of the health care delivery system and health care practitioners must direct their energies towards its promotion in the maintenance and restoration of
RECOMMENDATIONS

At the very least, every health care provider should bring their knowledge and understanding of psychology to bear in their daily dealings with colleagues and patients.

In view of the demonstrated value of psychological treatment and its importance in health care delivery, the full integration of psychological strategies would be a positive development for the healthcare providers and the system. To this end the authors suggest that students in medicine and other allied healthcare professions should be taught psychology, particularly life span psychology, social and cross cultural psychology, and cognitive behavioural therapies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Most importantly, as healthcare provision is under tremendous pressure to meet the ever increasing demands of the general public, a way to achieve this and improve on the quality of service is through the integration of psychology and the adoption of the biopsychosocial approach to health care and illness.

Finally, health care professionals need to reenact the major motivation factors that attracted them into the profession. They need to recall that they were drawn to the profession both humanitarian spirit to serve others and by the public esteem which is accorded to the health service. Above all, the opinion expressed in this article is a clarion call for healthcare practitioners towards an effective and efficient patient care.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

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