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Download date: 13. Jan. 2024

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Abstract

The study is specifically interested in roles of technologized public relations and such influence in the dispensation of medical services in Federal Medical Centre, Jalingo. Findings from the research work related public relations to the customer care unit of firms and implies creative rapport cutting across the intra and inter-systems of the medical facility. The research made use of structured in-depth interview (IDI) as its source of data collection. The excellence theory, as well as the modernization theory provided the framework for the study. Thematic analysis was used in data analysis. It is to this end that ICT and Public Relations were seen as interdependent, bearing so much influence on the dispensation of medical services. Which is obvious in the fact that relationships at all levels, stem from communication which connotes appropriate conveyance of information both in content and process. Finally, conclusions from the study show that the medical centre in Jalingo is yet to fully embrace the advantages of technology, let alone its influence in promoting effective public relations. Hence, medical services tend to suffer and require timely interventions of significant bodies.

Keywords: Public Relations, Information, Communication Technology, Medical Centre, Medical services

1. Introduction

Information is seen as key to sustainable development in an ever growing globalized and digitalized society like ours. Hence, it becomes a contrary position when people do not align themselves with the contemporary tide of the society, which keeps dramatically evolving into a highly digitalized one (Anie, 2011). It is imperative that for one to be effectively integrated into the information scheme of our technologized society; positive efforts must be made toward understanding the workings of the means to "information" as an end. One major parameter that is used in judging organizational and individual development is access to information. Access to information in current societies cannot be easily separated from Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A great role which Information and Communication Technology had endlessly played effectively hitherto, is in the area of Public Relations, which has to do with both inter-communication and intra-communication systems and models, for and within every organization (Lamb & McKee, 2005). While public relations hold the relationship and physical communication, ICT holds the virtual communication and passage of information, regardless of time and space. It is therefore not possible to make one independent of the other. This was captured in Shivute, Mambe and Owe (2008) opine that ICT has dramatically influenced public administration and services by improving its level of efficiency. To this end, this works seeks to see how ICT through public relations enhances the delivery of quality medical services to patients.

In another development, the Federal Medical Centre, Jalingo (FMC), is a system like structure, that has various components, ranging from all of its wards; departments; service users; management among others, of which the Public Relations and ICT is part and parcel. The overall functioning of the medical centre is largely anchored on the activities of the public relations and ICT units as regards access, circulation and utilization of information. Informational concerns bridge the gap between the intra and inter communities that relate with the medical centre and equally fosters democratic and liberal principles in the cause of service giving and service consumption. Thus, in view of veritable Public Relation activities, the importance of Information and Communication Technology cannot be overemphasized, considering the

evolution of our world into a virtual community and a global village. This was rightly captured in the words of Grunig (1992), who asserted that the present age of the world has made an introduction of science and technology in enhancing public relations. Therefore, contemporary public relation activities are predicated on scientific gadgets as a means to foster relationship building and information exchange.

2. Statement of the Problem

It is a norm for medical organisations to seek growth and development in all of their make ups and jurisdiction. These medical organisations would always seek to improve on quality of manpower and service delivery and gain reputation in handling medical cases that guarantee the saving of lives. These indicators are very essential for such organisations to meet with the demands of an ever dynamic society like ours. Organisations all over, are judged by the efficacy of service delivery, which is very consequential to all other indicators of growth and development for the organization (Otaki, 2006). Thus, poor service delivery in medical systems would proportionally lead to lesser economies of scale for profit based institutions; unnecessary loss of lives and loss of public reputation. To this end, medical organisations must ensure that the distance between itself, its services and the service users and all other members of the system is effectively bridged. Hence, an effective Public Relation, fully contextualized to the demands of technological development becomes the remedy. Where this is lacking, problems would definitely characterize the system.

It is in illumination of the foregoing that Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) aver that PR is managerial and also responsible for creating conditions that promote productive relational ties between organisations and stakeholders. Therefore, every relationship which an organisation tags Public Relationship must understand the concept of a sustained process of mutuality, care and networking. In corroboration to the above, Lamb and Mckee (2005) posited that every formal organization is like a system with components. For the entire system to be productive on the continuum, the components must have to be harmoniously functioning together. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the place of an ICT based public relations in enhancing medical services in FMC, Jalingo.

The study will be guided by the following research questions:
1. What is the knowledge of workers and patients in Federal Medical Centre, Jalingo regarding ICT and its operations?
2. Does ICT based public relations influence the quality of healthcare service delivery?
3. Are there existing policies and legislations that could promote ICT based public relations in health organisations in Nigeria?
4. What are the challenges faced by ICT and its possible influence on public relations activities in the institution as regards health services?

3. Research Objectives

1. To understand the depth of knowledge of workers and patients regarding ICT and its operations in the study area.
2. To determine the relationship existing between ICT based public relations and quality healthcare service delivery.
3. To identify existing policies and their influence in promoting ICT based public relations in Nigerian health organisations.
4. To understand the challenges faced by ICT and possible influence on public relation activities of health organisations.

4. Review of Relevant Literature

4.1 Public Relations Activities

Activities that foster and encourage a meeting point for service users, service receivers, staff and management of an organization, should be regarded as public relation activities. Public relation activities do range from all exercises aimed at ensuring a mutual relationship within systems in an organization and as well those outside the system, which is largely facilitated and governed under the principles of communication. Thus, communication becomes a pivoting tool through which public relation and its activities would be realized. Nonetheless, in defining the term, Tench and Yeomans (2006) view it as a management function and further define it as:

'A distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilise change; serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools' (p17).

The above definition carries the functions of public relations and its inarguable essence in organizations of all sorts. More so, particular emphasis is being paid to management as key to effective public relations, taking into cognizance the complexities that usually circumstance humans and their relationships. Therefore, the usual stereotype of mere communication as a focus and function of public relation, becomes obsolete in recent times. According to Grunig (2001), PR has an expanded scope that transcends communication to include building productive relationships. In Macnamara (1999), public relation has become largely managerial for the purpose of producing effective systems with functional components. To this end, it becomes apparent that the jurisdiction of public relations now exceeds mere communication as it covers broader areas of building and sustaining relationships with significant persons; to harnessing quality measures that would appropriately disseminate information and bring about wider coverage of services, regardless of time and space.

Furthermore, public relation activities in an organization are too numerous to mention but some of which would include: first hand physical meeting with service users, reaching out to service users and target customers cutting across immediate boundaries through platforms of both print and electronic media, getting feedbacks from service users after receiving or anticipating services, promptly circulating information within the work environment to enable quick responses and not being limited by time and space, to mention but few (Grunig, 2000). The above stated tasks among others largely boil down to effective communication which results to an effective public relation within and outside of an organization. Therefore, organizations must build a veritable communication system that allows for effective exchange of information and feedbacks which would in-turn inspire commensurate responses (Millicent, 2013). In achieving this, the role played by ICT can never be underestimated, as all gadgets and outlets that would largely guarantee the tasks and capabilities mentioned above stem from Information and Communication Technology.

4.1.1 Health Institutions/Organisations

Health organizations and institutions, are usually categorized into primary, secondary and tertiary levels. According to Encyclopedia (2015), health care comes as both a preventive and curative remedy for human diseases, ailments and injuries. In Nigeria, primary health care system is the responsibility of the Local Government while that of secondary and tertiary level of health care, form the responsibilities of the State and Federal Government respectively.

Health care services and delivery system are products of hospitals and medical centres, and must be given pertinent attention by every nation. It is to this end that we can never overemphasize the role played by ICT in bringing to realization, quality health care delivery system. In asserting the foregoing, World Health Organisation (2003), stated that:

'a well-functioning health care system requires a robust financing mechanism; a well-trained and adequately paid workforce; reliable information on which to base decisions and policies; and well maintained health facilities and logistics to deliver quality medicines and technologies' (p105).

The statement above largely validates ICT in enhancing public relation activities in an organization. More so, significant persons should come to understand that healthcare is one sector that is heavily reliant on information to offer credible services to the human population (Nichols, Copeland, Craib, Hopkins & Bruce, 2008). This can be guaranteed by Information and Communication Technology. Omotosho, Emvoyibotarhe, & Adegbola alarmed serious workflow, economic and life threatening consequences for the health care sector if they don't key into the benefits of the world's technological trend. Hence, the need for appropriate response.

4.1.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its Relationship with Public Relations

Simply put, ICT has to do with gadgets and measures through which information is easily communicated across persons, regardless of time and space. Thus, making our world a global village and virtual community. These gadgets and measures include: Computers, Mobile phones, internet facilities, social networks, print media, CD ROM, tapes, projectors among others. All the above stated examples are very much of use in medical organizations and would enhance a

sustainable public relation, if manned by appropriate skilled personnel.

Consequently, following the new trend of a technologically driven society, Crede & Mansell (1998) stated that ICT competence is an important factor to be considered in sustainable development approach. It is in this light that Thioune (2003) established a significant relationship between productive use of ICT and development of nations. He further stated that Africa is lacking in this respect and would only get developed if they can meet the demands of a technological driven society. As stated by Akpore (1999), ICT ranks top among the technological inventions that have influenced the human society. Martin (1995) corroborates the above by stating that quality of life could be improved upon when the benefits of ICT permeate our everyday living. Annan (2002) made a motion for an information society where people are offered access to utilizing ICT gadgets and as well are equipped with the knowhow. Therefore, both care givers and care receivers must have at least the basic knowledge in handling these gadgets and utilizing the parts that characterize the exchange of information. To this end, the place of ICT in improving public relation activities of our organisations and health institutions, must be given serious attention, if our nation seeks to become a developed one, in time to come.

4.1.3 ICT Policy of Nigeria

In the year 2000, the Nigeria government deemed it knowledgeable to create a National Information Technology Policy, which essence was captured in its preamble as stated below:

> 'Information Technology (IT) is the bedrock for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment and challenges us to devise bold and courageous initiatives to address a host of vital socio-economic issues such as reliable infrastructure, skilled human resources, open government and other essential issues of capacity building. In addition, an Information Technology policy built on reliable human resources and infrastructure constitutes the fundamental tool and means of assessing, planning, managing development change and for achieving sustainable growth... A developing nation like Nigeria that aspires to participate effectively and become a key player in the emerging Information Age, needs to have in place, a highly efficient Information Technology system driven by a vibrant national IT policy'

The policy has in place 31 general objectives but for the purpose of this work, the related ones to the medical setting would be highlighted. They include:
- ❖ To improve healthcare delivery systems nationwide.
- ❖ To re-engineer and improve urban and rural development schemes.
- ❖ To develop human capital with emphasis on creating and supporting a knowledge-based society.

It is of no doubt that the National Information Technology Policy, ever since 2000, is a credible one and captures the length and breadth of the Nigeria Society. Hence, the government must be appreciated so far, in that, a percentage of the policy objectives have been visibly achieved. Nonetheless, there are still areas for improvement and until one out of every two Nigerian becomes ICT competent, including our rural population, we can't say we have achieved the essence of this policy. The massive implementation of this policy and its appreciation would go a long way in effectively boosting the place of ICT and consequently enhancing public relation activities of health organizations and other organizations in general, both for service givers and service users.

5. Theoretical Framework

Excellence Theory: Lindeborg (1994) asserted the excellence theory to be one that explains the demands and importance of Public Relations in improving the effectiveness of organisations. It centers round the management of communication within systems and structures and offers ideas on comparative advantage in the case of competitions (Grunig, 2000).

Also, to a large extent, it underpins the possible aids in terms of devices that would guarantee excellence in public relations. It also seeks to explain how organisations could boost their effectiveness by creating and maintaining productive relationships with its stakeholders (Grunig, 2002). As put forward by the theory, the effectiveness of organizations would be measured by its problem identification and solving capacity for those that are affected by its services. This they could achieve by engaging employees and service users in constant communication using reliable technological devices (ICT gadgets and measures). Hence, good public relationship becomes the yardstick predicating the success or failure of any organization. Therefore, in achieving communication within the system of service delivery and consumption, public relation activities become pivotal. The degree to which this can be achieved is save to an effective utilization of Information and Communication Technology.

Modernization Theory: The modernization theory justifies the essence of mentorship by nations who have done well to keep their population healthy for those who still struggle to do so. The proponents of this theory include among others David McClelland, Robert Bellah, Alex Inkless, Walter W. Rostow, Gabriel Almond, James Coleman and Neil Smelser. Modernization theory assumes that developing societies can achieve development if they follow the strategies and patterns that were used by developed societies. The main thrust of this theory is the belief that development requires developed societies to aid developing societies to learn from their own progress (Abanyam, 2013). It is in this vein that the Introduction to International Development Fall (2014) highlighted the following areas as the major ingredients of modernization: the perceived need to transform a backward society; a role model from the first world; a belief in a development path involving large government intervention with support from First World countries and the complete reconfiguration of people's lives to "modernize".

Given what is being stated above, it becomes obvious the evolution of our society into a modern state as a result of changes in worldviews, cultural accumulation and technological complexities, comes with its consequences. Pathetically, the elites of the Nigerian state usually spend resources from their private and national resources embarking on medical tourism which most times are routines for them. The negligence of indigenous medical facilities shows that these countries they visit are better off than what home can provide. Hence, the need for a constructive imitation, mentorship and pragmatic learning to have domestic facilities of equal repute to what is obtainable in these respective medical tourism destinations. To achieve this, ICT plays a major role buoyed by a strong public relation in areas of treatment and attendance to patients; public health sensitization; networking of professionals for patient's wellbeing and an overall health delivery services within and outside the walls of respective medical centres and hospitals. Though modernization theory has been criticized to be Eurocentric, prejudiced and demeaning other cultures in outlook (Otaki, 2006) but that does not negate its roles in proffering pragmatic solutions to deal with the complexities of a modern state.

6. Materials and Methods

6.1 Sampling procedure

The study adopted Cross-Sectional Survey Research Design. For information-rich reasons, the population used were within the age bracket of 15-infinity years that were selected purposively from four (4) departments for the staff and another five (5) different departments for the patients. The sample size used for this study was six (6) staff and (7) patients. In selecting the sample size, the snow ball sampling technique which is purposive and a non-random probability sampling technique was used. This was used because of the information-rich subject undergoing research and the need for proper referral to information-rich persons and departments, regarding the research topic. These referrals were done by the Head of Public Relations of the Medical Centre. However, on the part of the patients the availability sampling technique was used together with the purposive sampling technique based on meeting patients and support networks who were ready to offer themselves as respondents.

6.2 Data Collection and Analysis

A structured in depth interview guide was used for the study, in interviewing all 6 staff and 7 patients in the sample framework. The phone recorder was used in recording the responses of the interviewees, while a research assistant adept in the Hausa language took note of non-verbal cues and vocal responses of same interviewees. Transcription was first done in purely English language and later on in Hausa language, so as to reflect at verbatim the responses of all respondents. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the collected data via reporting themes of responses at verbatim that are relevant to questions.

6.3 Ethical considerations

The respondents gave their informed consent orally before the interview and recording. Respondents were also promised confidentiality on the grounds of restriction of name calling. Before the study was carried out, the Public Relations Department of the Hospital, utilized appropriate channels to seek for study approval on the grounds that findings should be made available to them.

7. Results and Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of respondents

Category	Age	Gender	Designation	Place of Residence
Staff 1	35	Male	Head of ICT Unit, FMC, Jalingo	Jalingo
Staff 2	46	Male	Secretary Admin Unit, FMC	Jalingo
Staff 3	41	Female	Head Public Relations Unit, FMC	Jalingo
Staff 4	33	Male	Personnel at Emergency Unit, FMC	Jalingo
Staff 5	29	Female	Personnel at ICT Unit, FMC	Zing
Staff 6	51	Male	Personnel at Admin Unit, FMC	Jalingo
Patient 1	60	Female	Emergency Ward	Jalingo
Patient 2	63	Male	Social Welfare	Takum
Patient 3	34	Female	Parent at Pediatric Ward	Jalingo
Patient 4	45	Male	X-Ray/Radiology Unit	Takum
Patient 5	25	Female	Gynecology Ward	Ardo-Kola
Patient 6	48	Female	Surgical Ward	Jalingo
Patient 7	19	Male	X-Ray/Radiology Unit	Jalingo

8. Staff

8.1 *What do you understand by Information and Communication Technology, usually referred to as ICT?*

A major staff (Staff 1) from the ICT unit stated that:

ICT refers to all gadgets that are technologically based to aid in quick information exchange. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

A staff (Staff 2) from the Administration unit stated that:

ICT is what has made our world a global village, in the sense that they assist humans to send and receive information wherever they are in the world. They include: phones, computers, internet facilities, softwares etc. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

They generally asserted their information-rich justification by satisfactorily expressing their knowledge over the subject matter.

8.2 *What do you also understand by the term, Public Relations?*

Public Relations could mean different things to different people, because of its relative definition, in as much as it bears some conventionalism. The staff respondents were made to answer this as a staff (Staff 3) from the PR unit said:

Public relations are actions that bring the public and organization as one system. You know that there is a gap between the public and the organization and these different people are needed for the organization to be effective. So, it is the job of public relations to find the common ground. (IDI/Staff/Female/January, 2015)

A major staff (Staff 4) of the Emergency unit, said that:

Public relation is both a department and the activities carried out by the department. Their basic responsibilities are to ensure that the gap between the public and the organization and even between employers and employees is managed. The public relation is a centre for information. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

A staff (Staff 5) of the ICT unit was of the opinion that:

Public relations are activities that should focus on smooth communication among members of the hospital system, especially those people that use our services. Information should not be lacking when there is an effective public relation. (IDI/Staff/Female/January, 2015)

8.3 *Is there a link between ICT and public relations? If yes, can you highlight them?*

Respondents asserted similar responses to this question. The head of the ICT department (Staff 1) said:

The world has gone technological, there is virtually no place were technology has not colonized, including public relations. Technological equipment like phones, computers, internet and their likes have so filled the air of communication and public relations cannot be an exemption. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

A staff (Staff 6) from the administration department opined:

In the world today, if there are no communication gadgets how can we relate? So if there is no ICT, there cannot be Public relations.

From the PR unit of the medical centre, a major staff (Staff 3) said:

…In as much as our world is now a technological driven world, and ICT forms a great part of it, please, we should not see just that aspect as determining public relations. Public relations also involve human skills. Ability to use words and signs to talk to people, even physically. So, we should not only view public relations, as just the use of technological equipment to facilitate communication and conveying information among people within this hospital… In fact, everybody does public relations but we remain specialists… (IDI/Staff/Female/January, 2015)

8.4 Are the departments of ICT and Public Relations effective in the medical centre?

In as much as this question tends to be relative, as different answers could be given, respondents from the staff clique, asserted a relative positivity in this regard. The question to a great extent portends the functions of both departments, and their influence on the overall work done in the medical centre. To this end, a staff (Staff 4) of the Emergency unit said:

I must say that the ICT department is relatively effective in the medical center, in the sense that they function within their available resources given them. The cyber-café functions effectively, the data processing officers in the various departments are up and doing… These persons and facilities help to update our knowledge, so that we can make good decisions and relate effectively with the public. Personally, I visit the cyber-café to make research and of course medical research. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

A staff (Staff 2) from the Administration unit also added:

The central ICT department is an effective one and the public relations too. I am saying this because, whenever they are called upon, they deliver…. I know they face certain challenges but they are trying… For instance, in this hospital, we get analysed data of patients who use our services on day to day basis… I mean every day. Even when the medical supervisory ministry usually gets to request for any information, they get them first hand, with immediate effect. The guys are good but I believe limited resources is a problem for them, especially as it affects their relationship with our patients. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

Another staff (Staff 6) of the Administration unit said that:

If you go to the Chief Accountant Office, you will see a K. U. Bank Satelite that enables an error free financial report for the medical centre… The public relations usually disseminate information to the public using prints or other communication gadgets that is being facilitated by the ICT department… I am of the opinion that if these guys are provided with more training and equipment, they will do better. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

From the above respondents' sayings, it becomes obvious how the both departments are effective to guaranteeing improved service system for the hospital. In justifying the services of the ICT and Public Relations department and how their efficacy aid general hospital activities, World Health Organisation (2003), stated that:

'a well-functioning health care system requires a robust financing mechanism; a well-trained and adequately paid workforce; reliable information on which to base decisions and policies; and well maintained health facilities and logistics to deliver quality medicines and technologies'.

8.5 What are the challenges faced by both departments and how can they be effectively tackled?

The research assistant added to the above question – possible benefits that would ensue, if challenges are effectively tackled.

A staff (Staff 5) from the ICT unit said:

Challenges are usually obtainable at all levels in an organization. Here in the ICT, I will say that we are not being given so much attention like other departments. This is because we are seen as supportive to the core clinical services… If this would be taken care of, I believe that we will inform so many areas of the hospital, especially the wards of patients… Other core clinical staff usually go for training but here in the ICT, it is the reverse. In fact, I believe some of us can do these repairs of some gadgets they have in the wards they either call outsiders to do or send out of the country… At times, when we make recommendations on gadgets that would help us and the hospital, they use their protocols to kill everything… Oga, it is so sad… (IDI/Staff/Female/January, 2015)

A staff (Staff 3) from the PR unit stated:

The public relation is similar to the customer care service in the bank. Everybody just feel he or she can perform public relations task, without knowing that it is also a field of expertise. This issue makes us not to have so much voice as we should, in the medical centre. Our task goes beyond just submitting data when needed and attending to hospital 1st timers. We should be fully responsible for advert of medical services and facilitating communication between the hospital and the general public and anchoring of any medical programme as moderators. Once this is being looked into, there will be relevance that spurs development and I think the department can then be held accountable if we get to fail in our task. (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

A staff (Staff 2) from the Administration Unit maintained that:

More funds should be released into the ICT, because I believe our activities largely depend on them…. The ICT gadgets we have should also be maintained to be functional and also updated, so as to enhance the activities of the hospital in general… I would also advise that the public relations personnel should be sent to take professional courses in that respect or are they not professionals too? (IDI/Staff/Male/January, 2015)

9. Patients

The patients also responded to the structured interview questions posed to them. Responses in native languages, have been translated:

9.1 Are you aware of the term – ICT and Public Relations? (Brief in-depth sensitization is made for those who just have a surface knowledge on the terms)

An educated elderly patient (Patient 1) in the emergency unit answering this question, said:

ICT are technological devices that help people to pass information from one point to another point. My children are always using things like facebook, 2go, whatsapp etc to communicate with their friends… From the word "public relations", I will say it is relating with the public… it is the same to customer care in banks or other companies. (IDI/Patient/Female/January, 2015)

An elderly patient (Patient 2) from the social welfare unit was of the thought that:

Public relations be those people they come to our village to show us pictures and tell us things to do and not do. ICT fit be phone and laptop and from your explanation those pictures those people bring to my village, follow… Hakani kwo? (IDI/Patient/Male/January, 2015)

These sayings from the patients, which are similar to same sayings from others, asserts their knowledge over the subject matter.

9.2 How do you get information about the medical centre and the things they do?

The medical centre is known largely for its medical works and relatives. Thus, for service users to benefit largely from the hospital, they need to be informed. To this end, a parent (Respondent/Patient 3) who had his child at the pediatric ward answered by saying:

Sometimes the hospital is being shown on TV and they carry out programmes through the radio. I sometimes also see their posters and fliers, when they want to pass out information like immunization, ebola virus, HIV, breast feeding etc. around the state secretariat. (IDI/Patient/Female/January, 2015)

A patient (Patient 4) at the x-ray/radiology unit said:

… Of course you know the hospital is a popular one in Taraba State, people know about it and since they don't charge so much like the private ones, people will always talk about it… I came from Takum (Another LGA in Taraba State) to this place even… (IDI/Patient/Male/January, 2015)

A young pregnant mother (Patient 5) at the gynecology unit also said:

> *Although I hear about the hospitals from what persons say about it, but I still watch their programmes on TV and sometimes I hear about their programmes through the radio. I saw a Facebook page bearing the medical centre name, but it is not very efficient. (IDI/Patient/Female/January, 2015)*

In this light, the medical centre through its ICT and Public Relations, are doing great jobs, in terms of information dissemination but their presence on social networks which has taken over the scene of the virtual community, is still lacking.

9.3 How do you communicate with the staff of the medical centre?

Communicating with the staff of the medical centre, is paramount to quality service delivery, if the communication line is clear. One of the patients (Patient 6) at the surgical unit stated:

> *If I want to call doctor for example, I will send any of my family member around me to do the job; sometimes, if there is nurse, she can help me. If I have the strength, I will shout doctor!! But by doing that, I will be disturbing people and killing my health…*
> *(IDI/Patient/Female/January, 2015)*

Same patient (Patient 5) at the gynecology ward said:

> *If you look by that wall, you will see those numbers there. But, if I don't have credit (call credit), what should I do? I heard somebody complaining the other day about the network, while he tried calling. Of course, you should know we are in Nigeria. This people should look for a way to solve this. They can keep those kind phones in hotel rooms, for easy communication round the hospital… make them save people life kowoi… (IDI/Patient/Female/January, 2015)*

A younger patient (Patient 7) who is a university undergraduate at the x-ray/radiology unit lamented:

> *I have ideas to share with the medical institution on how to better the services, but I don't see ways I can do that. For God's sake, this is 21ST century, you don't expect me to start writing with my pen and insert into a suggestion box that might never be opened. The hospital should publicize their mail box and even host a website that would be managed by whosoever (PR most likely). By so doing we can effectively communicate and make their services okay… I am just here because my parents want me here… (IDI/Patient/Male/January, 2015)*

9.4 Have you ever experienced any emergency case where lack of communication made the case worse?

This shows forth the so much importance of ICT and information dissemination in the health sector, as regards cases of emergency. Why some patients were explicit over their answers, some showed indifference. A parent at the pediatric ward narrated:

> *Last week, one of the patients in my child's ward was breathing big-big, which made people in the ward to fear. The doctors were not around, only the nurses. If not for one good nurse, that child would have died… the doctor came so late, after one of the nurses went far to call him… I watched in one bature (whites) film, where if emergency come, someone would press something that would start shouting like an alarm, because of that thing, the doctor will run!! Nigeria can buy that thing ni…*

A patient (Patient 5) at gynecology unit said:

> *This people don't want to bring bature (western) things to this hospital. There was a day that the woman by my bed side died. The doctor was not around the hospital because they said they are on strike. When they call him, before he reach, the woman has die. I know in Bature place, you can see the doctor through one television and he can tell nurse what to do… Have you not watch it in TV before? (IDI/Patient/Female/January, 2015)*

The sayings of the patients lamented the gap in communication, especially in cases of emergency. Though, purchasing those highly technologized items, might not be feasible, but alternatives could be created and utilized effectively.

10. Discussion of Findings

Having made the findings addressing all research questions, it becomes so obvious that ICT and PR are two sides of same coin, and they play vital roles in enhancing medical services for a nation. Thus, it becomes a fact that the Federal Medical Centre, Jalingo and all other hospitals and medical centres, should pay more attention to its ICT and PR unit if it aspires to render quality services to its service users. Information dissemination is key to public relations. This goes rightly to justify the position of Tench and Yeomans (2006), who saw PR as:

> *'A distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilise change; serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools'.*

Public relations in contemporary times is an ICT based one. However, findings maintained that needed people and human oriented skills should not be eroded. This entails the use of words and empathy to relate at physical contact with people. Laying more emphasis on people skills as cited by one of the respondents, Grunig (2001) characterized PR with the attribute of having a humane face.

From the sayings of the respondents, communication in concordance with recent development, is poor at the medical centre and needs special attention. It is in favour of this that the Ghana Ministry of Health (2005) in its Health Sector ICT Policy and Strategy, stated that 'ICT is increasingly applied to the global health sector because it can significantly enhance and improve all facets of health services delivery'

In conclusion, there is no line separating ICT activities and Public Relations activities from general hospital activities, as all operate in circles, within a healthy system. The efficacy of either ICT or PR or both, predicates the total efficacy of even core clinical activities. Thus, none of these should be neglected, as they are all important to keep a healthy society, as cited in the ICT POLICY of NIGERIA - 'to improve the quality of health care delivery system, nationwide'. To this end, all medical institutions should adhere to the assertion of World Health Organisation (2003), that states:

> *'a well-functioning health care system requires a robust financing mechanism; a well-trained and adequately paid workforce; reliable information on which to base decisions and policies; and well maintained health facilities and logistics to deliver quality medicines and technologies'.*

Where this characterizes the dispensation of medical services in Federal Medical Centre, Jalingo, coupled with well skilled manpower, it becomes vivid that the health care service delivery system, would turn out to be one of its relative finest in existence. Suffice here to say that public relations must not stem from activities of the public relations department alone. It should also include relationships among hospital personnel and that established with the average man in the public. Hence, effective technologized communication becomes vital as a coordinating instrument. Effective communication will jettison conflicts in a medical setting, help save lives and further abet the production of a healthy nation that would rise to effective wealth creation for the state, since health is wealth.

11. Recommendations

From the findings of the research work, the following ideas can help improve the overall functioning of Federal Medical Center, Jalingo through an ICT based public relations:

❖ Public Relations and ICT should be seen as indispensable, in the same way core clinical services are being seen and all respect and leverage should be attributed to them, to enhance its functioning, which consequently guarantees the wellbeing of the general hospital system.

❖ Needed equipment should be looked out for to enhance the activities of the respective departments. Hence, were lacking, viable and veritable alternatives should be made.

❖ Hospital personnel should be made to understand how communication and relationship, are paramount to sustainable quality health care delivery.

❖ Public relations should effectively combine both technology and people oriented skills to improve services, and make themselves more relevant to the system.

- ❖ The management should from time to time, send their staff manning both public relations and ICT activities, on training, so as to update their skills and knowledge, relevant to their professional expertise.
- ❖ The hospital should pay more attention to relating with the public through social networks, such as: Facebook, twitter and their likes.
- ❖ A mailbox should be made available to the public for complaints and a website should be designed, to aid communication.
- ❖ The general hospital through the ICT body should update their infrastructures to relatively affordable ones, so as not to be kept in the dark in the spate of newly developed technologies.
- ❖ Hospital workers must at least possess facile knowledge on ICT and PR so as to deliver effective services to service users.

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