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**12TH EDITION  
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In this edition, fourteen (14) manuscripts scaled through the eye of the needle of the Editor-in Chief. The title of the papers in this edition are: Knowledge and utilization of youth friendly services among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Akure, Nigeria; What students think about the e-Learning tool “Moodle” in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Covid-19: awareness, anxiety and reasons influencing levels of anxiety among Nigerian nurses; Knowledge and attitude towards the transmission and prevention of covid-19 among nursing undergraduates of Osun State University, Osogbo; Outreach clinic services in the rural areas: an important means of improving maternal and child health services in developing countries; Sailing against the wind: the experience of a nurse leader on special national assignment in Nigeria; Perceived causes and effects of substance abuse among undergraduates at college of health sciences, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso; An appraisal of integrated health care model as panacea to promoting good quality health for all in selected hospitals in Nigeria; Effect of nursing staff shortage on hospital healthcare performance in Ladoke Akintola University Teaching Hospital Ogbomoso, Oyo state, Nigeria; Comparison analysis of nursing students' perception of quality of nursing programme in open distance learning with conventional face-to-face university learning; perceived utilization of electronic devices for nursing informatics practice among nurses in federal medical centres in Southern Nigeria; Awareness and acceptance of sexuality education among selected secondary schools students in Usiefrun Delta State; Awareness, perceived causes and effects of substance abuse among undergraduates at college of health sciences, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso and Socio-demographic characteristics of pregnant women and perception of the quality of antenatal services provided by midwives in south-south, Nigeria/

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | Knowledge and Utilization of Youth Friendly Services among Adolescents in Selected Secondary Schools in Akure, Nigeria<br><b>Elemile, M. G.; Oladapo M. M.; Ojo I. C.; Ogunmuyiwa O. E.; Okhomina F. O.</b>                               | 1  |
| 2. | What Students Think about the E-Learning Tool “Moodle” in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria<br><b>Ladan M. A.; Ibrahim A.h.; Lawal B. K.; Emmanuel O. O. &amp; Ahmed S.</b>  | 17 |
| 3. | Outreach Clinic Services in the Rural Areas: An Important Means of Improving Maternal and Child Health Services in Developing Countries<br><b>Ihuoma Anthonia Obi</b>   | 23 |
| 4. | Covid-19: Awareness, Anxiety and Reasons Influencing Levels of Anxiety among Nigerian Nurses<br><b>Ogechi H. Abazie; Linda C. Odikpo; Duke Emon; Oluwafunmilola. M. Mobolaji-Olajide; Dooshima D. Gbahabo; &amp; Aish U. Musa-Malikki</b> | 33 |
| 5. | Knowledge and Attitude Towards the Transmission and Prevention of Covid-19 among Nursing Undergraduates of Osun State University, Osogbo<br><b>Bello, M. Ademola &amp; Olawale, F. Oluwakemi</b>  | 43 |
| 6. | Sailing Against The Wind: A Narrative Research on Experience of a Nurse Leader on Special National Assignment in Nigeria<br><b>Bridget Omowumi Akin-Otiko</b>   | 53 |
| 7. | An Appraisal of Integrated Health Care Model as Panacea to Promoting Good Quality Health for All in Selected Hospitals in Nigeria<br><b>Adele, Hasimiyu Ademola; Afolabi, Yakibi Ayodele &amp; Oladele Patrick Olajide</b>                | 64 |
| 8. | Effect of Nursing Staff Shortage on Hospital Healthcare Performance in Ladoke Akintola University Teaching Hospital Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria<br><b>Amoo, P. O. ; Makinde, O. Y. &amp; Ajagbe, O. R.</b>                               | 74 |
| 9. | A Comparison of Quality of Nursing Programme in Open Distance Learning with Conventional Face-to-face University Learning: Undergraduate Students' Perspective<br><b>Igbinlade, Adewumi Segun</b>   | 86 |

10. Perceived Utilization of Electronic Devices for Nursing Informatics Practice among Nurses in Federal Medical Centres in Southern Nigeria  
**Ogini A. N. Ezenduka P. O. & Ndie E. C.** 103
11. Awareness and Acceptance of Sexuality Education among Selected Secondary Schools Students in Usiefrun Delta State  
**Adebamike Adenike Ayanyinka; Yetunde Omolola Oyedeji & Oyebamiji Rachel Toyin** 110
12. Awareness, Perceived Causes And Effects of Substance Abuse Among Undergraduates at College of Health Sciences, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso  
**Oluwatosin Comfort Olarinde; Daniel Durodoluwa Faleti & Damilola Mojisola Faleti** 120
13. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Pregnant Women and Perception of the Quality of Antenatal Services Provided by Midwives in South- South, Nigeria  
**Phoebe Nwamaka Kanikwu & Edith Nkechi Chiejina** 132



# OUTREACH CLINIC SERVICES IN THE RURAL AREAS: AN IMPORTANT MEANS OF IMPROVING MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH SERVICES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

IHUOMA ANTHONIA OBI

## ABSTRACT

*Outreach Services is a planned and regular visit by health professional that aims at bringing health services to the people who have no regular access to health care especially obstetric, infant and children care. Unfortunately, there have been no regular accesses to healthcare in rural areas of developing countries of the world, especially as regards the vulnerable groups such as women of child-bearing age and their children, as well as others that live in hard-to-reach regions of low-income countries. This paper examined outreach clinic services and the importance in maternal and child health (MCH). Thus, looked into the concept of outreach clinics, nature of MCH services in Nigeria including other developing countries and finally the importance of outreach clinic to MCH. Outreach clinic services are well planned and organized health care services rendered to the rural and underserved population who have no regular access to health care. It is seen as a key strategy for the provision of MCH care to the hard-to-reach and vulnerable group in the rural areas of the developing countries. Pregnant women in the rural areas are more in number than their urban counterparts and most of these women do not receive adequate antenatal and postnatal care, hence higher rates of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality are recorded. In Nigeria for example, there are lack of skilled healthcare workers in rural areas which is linked with poor maternal and infant health status. Outreach clinic services help in the provision of obstetric care services to mothers and children in the rural areas as well as vitamin A supplementation, family planning education, growth monitoring and immunization. It also helps to reduce costs and travelling inconveniences encountered by these women. If well organized and regularly carried out, outreach clinic programmes will be cost effective, provide active surveillance, helps to reduce maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates in Nigeria and other developing countries.*

**Keywords:** Outreach Clinic Services; Rural Areas; Maternal and Child Health

## INTRODUCTION

Access to healthcare depends largely on the area where an individual lives. Edmond, Yousufi, Naziri, Higgin-Steele, Qadir (2020) posited that access to care remains challenging, therefore outreach health care is very necessary to reach the most vulnerable women and children in remote areas and conflict-affected regions of developing countries. Scheevers and Jenkins (2015) reported that about half of the world population lives in rural areas while good health facilities and specialized medical services are concentrated in the major urban areas. The Ministry of Public Health, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Edmond et al, (2020) stated that about four hundred million (400,000,000) women and children were estimated to live in conflict-affected areas and millions more live in hard-to-reach regions of low- and middle-income countries. Existing literature have shown the following as promoting access to health: most health care professionals (qualified health care workers) do not like to work in rural and underserved areas in Nigeria: there are no good roads and transport facilities for poor masses to come to the urban places for health care services.

Larsen and Hart (2005) affirmed that nurse practitioners, physicians and midwives are lacking in rural areas where women need access to obstetric care. Larsen and Hart (ibid) reveals that it is pertinent to note that the problem of poor access to health care and lack of skilled health workers are mostly observed among child bearing mothers and their children as they form the most vulnerable population in every society. The specialist health professionals are reluctant to practice in the rural areas because of lack of social amenities

in such areas and lack of government support, no allowances and other incentives that could make their stay in the rural areas more meaningful. Provision of Obstetric care in the rural areas by unqualified health care personnel (quacks) makes women and children more vulnerable and leaves them to more harm.

Outreach clinic services remain a key strategy for providing maternal and child health (MCH) care to the underserved and hard-to-reach population. The World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Global Immunization Vision and Strategy (GIVS) all affirm that integrating immunization with other health interventions like treatment of diarrhoea, growth monitoring during outreach clinic services is a means of improving maternal and child health (Partapuri, Steinglass & Sequeira 2012). An Outreach clinic service is a planned and regular visit by health professionals from their specialized service area, (usually hospital in urban area) to the rural and underserved areas with the intention of bringing health services to the people. Maria Stopes International Organization Nigeria (MSION) (2020) affirms that during outreach clinics, the providers reach women in remote rural locations and urban slums where clinics and hospitals are scarce, too expensive to reach or where there is a shortage of skilled staff and equipment.

In other African countries such as South Africa, research documented that 43.6% of the people reside in rural areas and are served by only 12% of medical doctors and 19% of qualified nurses (Scheevers & Jenkins 2015). Almufleh et al (2017) stated that care of the underserved remain one of the most compelling challenges to American health care system. This indicates that poor health care service in most rural areas of the world is a well-known factor that causes poor health outcome of the people. This is more pronounced among rural mothers and their children.

Nurse midwives and doctors (skilled health personnel) are not usually available in the rural areas hence, women in such areas lack access to obstetric care while under five children do not

receive adequate child welfare services including immunization, growth monitoring and nutrition services. Existing literature reveals that maternal and child health services such as pregnancy, labour, postnatal services, infants and children services (immunization, growth monitoring, nutritional services an so on) are lacking in the rural areas because of non-availability, insufficient and mal distribution of qualified health care providers. As such, the importance of maternal and child outreach clinic services cannot be over emphasized. During outreach clinics, health care providers render the services to the rural dwellers directly in their communities. The services are given free of charge or at a very minimal cost, no transportation cost nor travelling inconveniences. The writer observed that outreach services for maternal and child health has been linked with improved pregnancy outcome, reduced maternal and infant morbidity and mortality, hence it should be encouraged.

### **Outreach Clinics Services**

Outreach clinic service is a type of health care service organized to deliver care to the rural dwellers, by primary health care centre, village, private hospitals and community health posts where there is no resident skilled workers. It can also be defined as health care services sent directly to the people in their remote areas with little or no fees. It offers primary preventive and curative services to the vulnerable group in the rural areas (Almufleh *et al* 2017). They are health care services that are carried out in communities which are geographically inaccessible or cut off from the provision of healthcare services by any of the facilities National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) 2017). Not only in the rural areas, outreach clinic can also take place in suburban or urban areas depending on the need of the centre, resources available and the type of services available in such a centre. Outreach clinic can take place in urban areas but the benefit is more observed and needed in the rural areas than in urban.

The rural areas are medically underserved and noted for having a high percentage of people living with poverty, having highest rate of unemployment, highest rate of un-insurance and few or no primary care physicians (Whelam 2010). Hart *et al* (2005) also observed that America rural women have lower income, higher unemployment rate, higher rates of chronic diseases and infant mortality than their metropolitan counterparts. Almufleh *et al.*, (2017) affirmed that outreach services can take place in area of common gathering within the rural community with co-operation of the community leader who will advertise the programme.

### **The Scope of services rendered during outreach clinics**

Outreach clinic services are among the public health initiatives found very useful to improve maternal and child health. Outreach clinics are designed to provide various maternal and child services such as child survival strategies, antenatal care, postnatal care, infant immunization and family planning services as well as more traditional medical care and comprehensive care for children with chronic diseases. The scopes of the services also include among others, the general outpatients' services, minor surgeries and referral services. Services rendered can also come in form of provision of health check-ups for industries and company staff and health education concerning the innovative technologies like telemedicine used in developed countries including United Kingdom, United States of America and United Arab Emirates (Health Connect 2019).

### **Provider of outreach clinic services**

Usually, it is organized and financed by a group or groups of health professionals such as National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Fellows of West African College of Nursing, Catholic Nurses Guild of Nigeria,

West African College of Obstetrician/Gynaecologist and so on. It can also be organized by Government and non-governmental organization of non-health related group. In this case, it will be carried out in collaboration with health professionals. Outreach clinic services rendered by the various groups mentioned above act as succour to numerous individuals living in rural areas and hard-to-reach centres.

The functions of the skilled health workers to aid in the prevention of diseases and complications arising from pregnancy, labour and puerperium cannot be over emphasized. For instance, nurses/midwives ensure that pregnant women are assisted to have access to antenatal care or they conduct health education on importance of antenatal care, birth preparedness, adequate nutrition in pregnancy, signs of labour, exclusive breastfeeding and postnatal visits. Child welfare (immunization, growth monitoring and promoting children's health) in the rural areas is also an important role of the nurse/midwives.

### **The nature of maternal and child health services in the rural areas of developing countries**

The most vulnerable population in every society are the childbearing mothers and their children, yet they are the major group that have poor access to health care services and this problem is more pronounced in the rural areas of sub-Saharan West Africa of which Nigeria is one. Acoster (2001) revealed that pregnant women living in rural areas are much larger in number compared with their urban counterparts. Acoster (*ibid*) observed that rural women who are younger in age have less perinatal care with higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates. The rural areas are medically underserved and, in most cases, linked with poverty.

Mother and child being in optimum well-being is imperative in every society worldwide. Evidence has shown that outcome of pregnancy

and child survival largely depends on prenatal care and labour services rendered to the mothers. Poor antenatal care and labour services of rural women are the major determinants of maternal and child mortality. National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA) (2010) reported that about 3.2 million out of 136 million births that occur annually worldwide, end up in still births, while good number up to 4 million babies die within the first month of delivery. This pointed to the fact that new born survival is directly linked to quality antenatal care. It is not far from the truth that majority of this new born deaths occur in the rural areas of developing countries

In Nigeria, more that 44% of new born deaths occur between 0-1 day of life showing that new born deaths are mainly due to unsupervised delivery which is an important factor in the rural areas. There is lack of Integrated Maternal New born and Child Health (IMNCH) services in various rural areas in Nigeria. Ashok and Karger (2014) report the poor state of health care facilities and services in the rural areas of India, where 80% of the specialist health care providers live in urban areas and only 13% of rural dwellers have access to primary health care centres; 52% of all mothers in India receive up to 3 ANC throughout the period.

Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as well as universal health care programmes have not made enough impact on health of the rural dwellers of developing countries, conflict-affected areas and thickly populated countries. Limited access to health for marginalized groups such as women and children still exists and this is coupled with the problem of non-utilization of the available health care facilities and services. Again, while the peripheral health centres are underutilized, tertiary and secondary health facilities are over-loaded with the work that could have been done at the primary centres and this eventually results to low quality health care services to the people.

Lack of access to emergency obstetric care (EOC) by nurse/midwives and obstetricians is linked with increase rate of maternal and new

born deaths. Many times, women in the rural areas develop complications in labour and due to such factors as distance, lack of access roads, skilled health workers and transport facilities, lose their babies and at times both mother and baby may be lost. Major causes of maternal deaths are recorded as haemorrhage 23%, infection 17%, toxemia/eclampsia 11%, unsafe abortion 11%, obstructed labour 11%, malaria 11% and anaemia 11% (National Primary Health Care Development Agency) (NPHCDA) (2010). Rural women and their children depended much on public health programmes such as outreach programme for their accessibility to care. In fact, there are well known disparities in access to maternal and child care services between rural women and their urban counterparts.

Observations have shown that most pregnant women do not receive tetanus toxoid all through the period of gestation while the infants do not receive or complete their immunization against preventable diseases such as poliomyelitis, hepatitis B vaccine, measles vaccine and others. This is because there are few numbers of health facilities in the rural areas and the available ones are poorly equipped. Again, there is lack of skilled health workers and the few available are irregularly distributed. There is clear evidence that rural communities in Nigeria are faced with challenge of inadequate and inequitable distributions of skilled health workers (HERFON, 2006).

Distance, travel time to urban facilities and cost of essential drugs are also peculiar problems that impede maternal and child services in rural communities of Nigeria. These factors are among the major causes of poor maternal and child health indices in rural areas. Hart *et al* (2005) discussed that in some rural communities distance is a factor as mothers travel for many hours in order to access antenatal and infant care services. This is because citing of health facilities in Nigeria is often based on political expediency rather than perceived needs of the people. It is observed that government officials and politicians in

Nigeria locate health facilities and other infrastructure in their hometown instead of where it will benefit the general public. Rural dwellers also have the challenge of using fake, expired and substandard drugs which may equally be unaffordable despite the fact that they are “essential drugs”. People spend much money buying the drugs without getting the required effect, hence they continue to be sick and continue to spend more and more. This negates the all-important Bamako initiatives of 1987 during which assembly of African Health Ministers adopted strategies to increase the availability of essential drugs and other health care services for Sub-Sahara Africa. In Nigeria health financing through national health insurance scheme (NHIS) is not effective especially among the rural dwellers (only seen in papers and heard on televisions). The World Health Organisation stated that the type of health care financing adopted by any country should not be the type that will prevent people from seeking and using services. It will not be the type that will demand instant payment by the people unless in a situation where the patient is able to pay (HERFON 2006). The situation is different in Nigeria especially in the rural areas, as there is little or no form of health insurance services in the rural areas of Nigeria.

National Health Insurance Scheme was established and launched in Nigeria in 2005 with the aim of providing comprehensive health care services at affordable cost. It was planned to cover government employees, self-employed, rural dwellers, the less privileged and vulnerable groups in the community and to protect families from financial hardship and huge medical bills. It is appalling to note that the parading of universal health coverage (UHC) of NHIS is only on paper not in practice as it has not implemented any community-based health insurance (CBHI) within the communities of the federation. Majority of Nigerians especially the rural dwellers and vulnerable groups such as pregnant mothers, children, the aged, physically challenged and less privileged still depend on out-of-pocket expenses for their health care. According to Gustafsson-Wright and Skellens

(2013), Nigeria has the highest out-of pocket health expenditure and poorest health indicator in the world, hence embarking on other forms of healthcare delivery such as outreach clinics to help the rural dwellers/vulnerable groups is very necessary. It is observed that rural women and their infants have higher rate of chronic diseases and mortality; the women have higher rate of unemployment than their metropolitan counterparts. Maternal and infant immunization services in the rural areas are nothing to write home about

### **Types of outreach clinic services**

Outreach clinic services can be categorized according to the site of service delivery and the group targeted. In this paper, four (4) types are highlighted:

- a. **Domiciliary Outreach Service:** Here the service delivery is undertaken at individual homes.
- b. **Detached Type:** This one is undertaken at a public environment, targeting services to individuals in a particular community.
- c. **Peripatetic Type:** Here the services are provided at a public or private environment while targeting organization rather than individuals.
- d. **Satellite Type:** The outreach services can take place in any community gathering place such as church premises, school, health centre market place as far as the site is close to the residence of the people that need the services.

### **Importance of Outreach Clinic Services to Maternal and Child Health**

Outreach clinic services have a tremendous positive impact to health of mothers and children in the rural areas both nationally and internationally. The writer believed that these services act like a channel through which various maternal and child services are rendered to the rural dwellers. Such health services include antenatal, labour and postnatal

services. This paper reviews numerous benefits of outreach clinic service to maternal and child health which include but not limited to the following:

1. **Provision of obstetric care:** Existing literature showed that outreach clinic services provide antenatal care, nutritional care of the pregnant women, vitamin A supplementation, family planning education and sensitization, maternal and infant immunizations, growth monitoring and supply of insecticide treated nets (ITN). Other services include deworming of children, newborn care as well as Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) (Partapuri et al 2012).

Roosbeh et al (2016) reported that barrier to obtaining prenatal care among rural women was linked with transportation/inconveniences of bad roads; and outreach clinics to such areas can solve the problem, in which case mothers would receive quick and adequate care in their natural environment without going through all the inconveniences.

2. **Improvement on Continuity of Care and Monitoring Services:** Outreach clinic provides closer surveillance of the population and this improves the continuum of care and makes collecting, retrieving and disseminating of health information more efficient and comprehensive. Outreach care providers work closely with the Primary Health care centers.
3. **Benefits to Adolescents:** Outreach clinic services for mothers and children can also be of benefits to adolescents because during this period of life it is pertinent to introduce knowledge of family planning to the adolescents. This helps to prepare them for future family roles. Outreach clinic also provides information about sexual abuse, mental health/other health services and other health information that will be of benefit to the adolescent as he/she grows to assume family roles. Outreach clinic

services to this group helps to curb unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse as well as injury.

4. **Provision of health care in natural environment:** Outreach services provided in the rural community provides the avenue for reaching the women and their husbands in the natural environment. By so doing, it becomes easy to get the men and involve them in the discussion of issues concerning their wives and children. For instance, if a child is found to have kwashiorkor, the father will be encouraged to assist in bringing money for feeding the child with protein-rich diets.
5. **Reduces disparity of care between urban and rural dwellers:** The disparity in access to care between the rural and urban women (Hart et al 2005) is reduced through outreach programmes organized in the rural communities. The rural women are known to have lower income, higher rate of unemployment and higher rate of maternal and infant mortality than their metropolitan counterparts. Through outreach clinics services provided by health related and non-health related care providers, these rural women get reasonable health benefits.
6. **Other benefits of outreach services** as identified by Nxumalo, Goudge and Thomas (2013) observed that outreach clinic services in the rural areas have numerous benefits to mothers and children such as improving access to health care, reduces poor maternal indices, improving quality of care to mothers and children, also, reducing cost and reduces pressures on hospitals in the urban areas

They also found that rural outreach clinic services encourage negotiations with the service providers for further treatment and supports training of the primary care givers so that they can further teach MCH clients. The experience gained by the primary healthcare nurses during outreach clinic services in the rural areas helps to

equip them with the knowledge of caring for the mothers during antenatal, labour and puerperium which reduces maternal and infant mortality rates among the rural dwellers. It also helps in the care of the infants as well as in careful assessment and regular monitoring of the clients in the rural communities.

7. **Reduces cost and transport inconveniences:** Poor utilization of health care services is not always as a result of poor maternal knowledge and awareness but also due to high cost and travelling logistics. Thus, outreach clinic services helps to bridge the gaps created by these problems. This goes to support the statement by Wallingford (2013) which affirms that outreach clinic services by nurses and other health care providers bring about cost reduction and containment, hence the importance of outreach clinic services to MCH
8. **Provides preventive care, minor surgeries and dental services:** Mothers and children usually receive primary healthcare services, general outpatient care, minor surgeries, preventive services, dental and referral services during outreach clinic (Yu, Hills, Ricks, Bennet and Oriol 2017; Jinadu in NOUN 2017)
9. **Provides the model of mobile health map:** Outreach clinics also helps to provide a model of mobile health maps for these mothers and their children, that is, a programme that helps to monitor the trends and characteristics of their disease conditions.
10. **Provision of specialist health service:** Specialist health services are also offered to these women together with other rural dwellers.
12. **Reduction of infant morbidity and mortality:** Chinyama (2012) confirmed that outreach clinic service plays a tremendous role in lowering maternal and infant mortality rates,

13. **Impact by text messages:** The use of text messages via cell phones in outreach clinics is use to get laboratory test results which has immensely reduced the time the processing and getting of response takes, considering the distance from rural to urban areas where equipped hospital laboratories are located. Again outreach nurses can use mobile phones to send a child's nutritional data to a national monitoring service area. In this case analysis can quickly be done and result sent back to the rural health workers who will now give adequate care to the child using the result
14. **Provision of training:** Researches have revealed that outreach health workers provide training for rural health staff on integrated management of childhood illness (**IMCI**) so that they will be able to diagnose and treat the most common childhood illness in the localities. Chinyama (2012) affirms that the outreach care providers can diagnose and treat even severe form of malnutrition all to help reduce infant mortality rates.

#### **Nursing Implications to Outreach Clinic Services to the Rural Dwellers**

To improve access to health among the rural dwellers, nurses have been and still need to remain in the forefront. Our view here is that professional nurses in Nigeria are embracing the current knowledge explosion and improvement in science and technology. Many nurses are improving their educational background up to acquiring MSc and PhD in areas like maternal and child health, community health nursing, health education and others to be able to give adequate and up to date care to the general public. The knowledge of these courses and experiences so acquired would equip them to take active part in organizing and implementing specialized services including outreach clinic services to the rural dwellers especially mothers and children. The nurses, midwives and Public

Health Nurses played important roles in outreach services such as providing both medical and health services to mothers, their infants and even to the entire family members.

They also give health education by motivating expectant mothers to observe the rules of health and to utilize the various resources provided by the government for assistance in programmes and improvement of general health and social welfare of the community. Also they assist in the control of communicable diseases, they organize and participate in the maternal and child health care for example, antenatal, deliveries, family planning, post abortion counselling and care and so on. Health care givers also organize and participate in infant welfare clinics including immunization, oral rehydration therapy, and other child survival programmes. This is also the case in school health programmes as they ensure services for geriatric and the handicapped as they promote accessibility and affordability of family food including proper nutrition to prevent morbidity and mortality especially in children. They administer food supplementation such as iron and folic acid fortification/supplementation to prevent deficiencies in pregnant women.

Nurses also promote quality of life for those who no longer have the ability to care for themselves alone, enhance provision of humanizing practices which include the physical, social, psychological and spiritual perspectives in search of wellbeing and quality of life through an integrative care. Wallingford (2013) affirmed to this when he said that outreach clinic services by nurses and other health practitioners brings about cost reduction and containment for the hard-to-reach people. There is therefore a clarion call for all nurses and midwives, no matter the level, to join and take active part in the organization and provision of such services as this helps in reducing maternal and child morbidity and mortality as well as development and growth of healthcare system in Nigeria.

## Challenges

These include the fact that only few personnel are willing to participate, Few equipment are also available and there is difficulty in getting transportation for the workers, drugs and few equipment that are available to get to the masses in the community. Poor roads, few available vehicles could hardly pass through without incurring major damages. All these are coupled by lack of funds.

## Recommendations:

- Government and non-governmental organizations should see the need in outreach clinic services and give a maximum support to the organizers by providing drugs, hygiene materials and healthcare equipment needed to deliver the services.
- Government and other founders and organizers of health programmes in various developing countries of the world need to invest in implementation and evaluation of outreach services as it is important in the reduction of maternal and child morbidity and mortality rates.
- Different healthcare organizations including Society for Obstetricis and Gynaecologist, Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, West African College of Nursing, Medical Laboratory and Pharmacy Associations and so on should see it as a point of duty and free will assistance to help deliver health services to the hard-to-reach people by means of outreach clinic services.
- Specialist, federal and general hospitals located in the urban areas should from time to time organize and deliver outreach clinic services to rural areas within their states and location. They should not concentrate their services only in the urban areas where only the affluent live.



## Conclusion

Outreach clinic services helps to improve access to health care by mothers and children. It serves as a medium through which obstetric care is rendered to the rural and hard-to-reach women. In fact, outreach clinic services is conceptualized as an important aspect of health care services, hence it needs on-going support and commitment by the government, non-governmental organization as well as health professionals and concerned Individuals.

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