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Evaluation of Records Management Practices at the Ministry of Health, Abia State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Records are documentary evidence of routine transactions made or received by an organization in pursuit of its legal obligations irrespective of the physical form or characteristics. They are category of information identified by the particular functions they perform in support of business, accountability and cultural heritage. They confirm who did what, where, and when. Therefore, records management is making and maintaining complete, accurate and reliable evidence of official business in the form of recorded information. Records are important to the administration of government institutions, because they contain the necessary information that helps government programmes function effectively. Records give government grounds for making decisions, administering programmes and providing administrative continuity with past operations. Records help to make the government and its officials accountable. It is therefore worth noting that for the purpose of transparency and accountability, government institutions should create and preserve reliable and usable records.

Records management is the application of systematic analysis and control of records from their creation through processing, maintenance and protection to final disposal. Records management is aimed at preparing, arranging, storing and retrieving of records and information when they are needed. It refers to the whole range of activities which an organization should perform to properly manage its records. The key activities include setting records management policy, assigning responsibilities, establishing and promulgating procedures and guidelines, as well as designing, implementing and administering recordkeeping systems. Records management is important because it supports an organization to make decisions based on evidence; meet operational, legal and regulatory requirements; be open and accountable; enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness; and maintain organization or collective memory.

There are five (5) stages involved in the efficient management of records throughout their life cycle: records creation, maintenance (storage and protection), use and disposition (transfer and disposal) and retrieval. The creation of records should be properly organized. This is necessary to ensure easy retrieval when they are needed for their purpose. Records maintenance (storage and protection) involves transferring inactive records from the main files into the transfer files to be stored away and ascertaining that records are kept for the pre-determined length of time established by retention schedules and overseeing the actual

destruction of unsafe records to pave way for useful ones. It is usually a management decision to dispose records that are no longer of any use. Records retrieval involves all those activities in locating and removing tangible records from the files or the file itself as a whole from the file cabinets.

The goal of records management is to ensure that civil servants create the records they need, keep these records in ways that allow for efficient access and use, maintain the records for as long as they need them for operational, legal, and audit purposes, and to dispose of them when they are past their retention period. Most records are destroyed at the disposal point; however a small percentage of records are identified as having permanent value to the ministries. These records should be transferred to the state Archives. For records management practices to be effective, policies need to be put in place that are needed for records creation, maintenance, and preservation. Records retention and disposal schedules are needed to guide and control the management of records from creation to disposal. Records management in developing countries, and indeed Nigeria is yet to attain the level of attention and support it has received in countries of the developed world.

Abia State is one of the thirty-six states (36) that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is a state in south-eastern part of Nigeria created in 1991 from part of Imo State. The citizens are predominantly Igbo. The capital is Umuahia, although the major commercial city is Aba, formerly a British colonial government outpost. Arochukwu is the third largest city. Abia is sometimes referred to as “the Japan of Africa” due to its numerous factories. The Ministry of Health is one of the twenty two ministries in Abia State saddled with the responsibility of rendering health services to the people.

Problem Statement

Records are a vital asset in ensuring that government institution and ministries are run effectively and efficiently, and are accountable to their staff, and the community that they serve. An organization with a solid foundation of proven successful records management practices will: preserve the right information for the correct length of time, meet legal requirements faster and more cost effectively, control and manage records management storage and destruction, archive vital information for business continuity and disaster recovery, provide information in a timely and efficient manner regardless of urgency of

request, use technology to manage and improve the records management program, integrate policies and procedures throughout organization, establish ownership and accountability of the records management program, and arrange for continuous training. In the case of the Ministry of Health, the researcher observed in the course of her doctoral research that there is a challenge in the management of records such that the attributes of good records management practices are lacking and it is not clear how records are managed both physical and electronic. Furthermore there have been many instances whereby records were reported to be misplaced or missing thus raising questions as how records are managed, what system and policies are used in terms of records management at the Ministry of Health, which legislations and standards govern records management at the Ministry of Health and who are charged with the management of records at the Ministry of Health? These questions motivated the researcher to conduct this study on records management practices at the Ministry of Health since there is no reference of any study that has been done in regard to records management practices at the Abia State Ministry of Health.

Objectives of the study

The following were the objectives that guided the study

1. To establish the existing records management practices at the Abia State Ministry of Health
2. To examine whether records management practices conform to national legislation, policies and guidelines.
3. To examine whether records management practices at the Abia State Ministry of Health conform to records management standards.
4. To establish challenges facing the Ministry of Health in its records management practices.
5. To suggest how records management practices can be enhanced by use of best practices.

Research Questions

1. What are the current practices of managing records at the Abia State Ministry of Health?
2. What mechanisms, policies, rules, procedures and legislation are in place for managing records in Abia State Ministry of Health?
3. Which records management standards are in place for managing records in the Abia State Ministry of Health?

4. Which challenges affect the management of records in Abia State Ministry of Health?
5. What recommendations can be made to improve records management best practices at the Abia State Ministry of Health?

Significance of the study

This study is important for government, policy makers, records professionals and researchers. This is because the study provides useful information to governments and policy makers for the formulation of records management legislations, regulations and policies both at the national and state levels to help ameliorate the challenges that government institutions encounter when creating and managing records throughout its life cycle. Specifically, the study would inform policy formulation including guidelines and regulations in records management at the Abia State Civil Service.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on the evaluation of records management practices at the Abia State Ministry of Health. It looked at a range of practices involved in the management of records from creation, use, maintenance to final disposition. This research work was carried out at the ministry of health, Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria. The study was limited to only staff in the senior category (levels 7 – 16). Staff in the Registry and administrative department and others involved in records management took part in the study.

Literature Review

Records can be described as anything that contains information which has been created or received in the course of business and which can be used as evidence of business transaction. Several researchers (Agere, Lemieux & Mazikana 1999; Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2013; Shepherd, 2006) have made significant effort towards providing a candid explanation to what a record, records management and records management practices really entail. Shepherd (2006) affirms that a record is a documented proof of an event that embodies some elements of action, usually embarked on by individual or a work group in the course of their business which gives birth to a definable outcome. In the view of Agere, Lemieux and Mazikana (1999), a record is any medium or device which embodies the attributes of being used as a

tool in which information can be recorded. These media include paper, magnetic tape and disc, microfilm, audio-tape, film, slide, photograph and other medium of electronic data storage. According to Igbokwe-Ibeto (2013) records management is an activity embarked on for the sole purpose of keeping track of information which can be used as a proof or evidence of an activity or action undertaken and a basis on which future decisions are made

Records ranges from simple memos and scribbled note, email, to invoice mail. Records serve many functions in organizations. They are the channel through which government can be held accountable to the people. Records are essential in the conduct of office business and make administration more efficient and effective. Records document official transactions and judgments and decisions are based on reliable records. Records play an essential role in all spheres of human engagements, and are integral variables in the pursuit of business inclined activities and the maintenance of social interaction. Hence the origin of systems of archival record keeping can be traced to over several millennia in Mesopotamia before spreading to Egypt, the Mycenaean world, and the Persian Empire, continuing through the Hellenistic and Seleucid periods (Brosius, 2003).

Functions of Records

Records serve the primary function of keeping track of information, and its reproduction for use at a later stage. In trying to pinpoint the rationale behind the act of record keeping, Dearstyne (1985) opined that records are created for various reasons and can possess either a short term or a long time (archival) value. It can be to serve administrative function, fiscal function, and legal function or to serve as a source of information. He stressed further that records which have a long term value should be adequately preserved, because they create room for an easy understanding of the past. Records which embody an enduring (long term) value should be meticulously handled and stored away because they serve as a medium through which past events and phenomenon could be reinvented to form parts of the present reality. According to Popoola (2000) recorded information helps the civil service in planning, decision making and controlling. For effective planning, decision making and controlling to take place, there must be timely access to records.

Records especially in the public sector are as essential as other public resources such as assets and finances, public records therefore; should be accorded same measure of importance or value placed on other public resources. In addition, public records unlike other public

resources are not easily replaceable when misplaced or damaged, this distinctive nature of public records makes it a delicate item, and as such should be handled with all carefulness. In essence, records are veritable tools in the effective administration of an organization. From the meaning provided by scholars on what record is, it can be deduced that a breakdown in the transfer of information between component units in an organization, consequently will result to a breakdown in the administrative and executive operations thus hindering effective service delivery. The administrative functions of governments and public office holders would also be brought to halt as a result of a breakdown in the process of record creation, transfer, storage, retrieval and reproduction as all government officials depend on records from their own files for the day to day performance of their work.

Records Management Policy

A records management policy refers to an official document that guides records management in an organization. The purpose of a records management policy is to ensure that full and accurate records of all activities of an organization are created, managed and retained or disposed of appropriately in accordance with relevant legislation. This will enable the organization to achieve information accessibility, control of growth of records, help to minimize litigation risk and safeguard vital records. It also helps in ensuring accountability and transparency and protection of rights and interests of clients and the community. In concordance with the above view, Kennedy and Schauder, (1994) opined that, failure to control the creation of records may delay decision making, the more information managers need to sift through and assimilate the more cumbersome and slow the decision-making process becomes. Tagbotor, Adzido and Agbanu (2015) conducted a study on the analysis of records management and organizational performance in a polytechnic in Nigeria, the findings of the study indicated that records management in the institution was found to be comprehensive as there are records management policies and manual in place which are being used. This implies good records management practice. In another study by Out, Osei and Ohene (2014) on Management of Students' Records at Koforidua Polytechnic, the findings revealed that there is no such policy guiding the management of student records. In the absence of such a policy the polytechnics lack the mandate and direction for the creation, use and preservation of records.

Records Management Program

Records management program implies a systematic approach, framework and strategies developed so as to attain efficiency in the process of record handling, control and management. According to Ngoepe (2008) a records management programme seeks to efficiently and systematically control the lifecycle (creation, use, maintenance, archive or disposal) of records that are routinely generated as a result of activities and transactions. Notably, the purpose of a records management program is to develop programs which will provide knowledge on the proper and adequate procedures to employ in the handling of records all through its life cycle. Odeyemi, Issa and Saka (2011) stressed that a well-organized records management program saves a lot of money for the administration of the public service by helping to control the quantity and quality of information created and by ensuring the maintenance of the information in a manner that effectively serves the need of the organization. Griffin and Akotia (2007) added that for an organization to attain efficiency in all its activities ranging from service delivery, entronement of good governance and its attributes, such organization should embark on practices which advance a records management programme. This is so because the attainment of good governance in any sector (public or private) is highly influenced by the availability of valid and reliable records.

Kennedy and Schauder (1994) highlighted eleven elements of a comprehensive records management program. These include records management feasibility study and records survey; filing system for active records; records retention and disposal planning; management of semi-active and inactive records; management of the creation and generation of different types of records; vital records protection programme; policy and procedures documentation; training programmes and ongoing review. Similarly, Odeyemi, Issa and Saka (2011) stated that the structure and organization of a records management program must be based on the following components: personnel management; financial management; forms management and control; reports management and control; correspondence management and control; records management procedures manual; files management and control; records centre management; vital Records management and control; records inventory and appraisal; records retention and disposition schedule; directives management and control; mails management; micrographic and reprographic management; archives management and ICT management and equipment management.

Chirwa (2014) opined that a good records management program will result in the control over the creation and growth of records. Despite decades of using non-paper storage media, paper

records continue to escalate in government offices. An effective records management program limits the generation of records or copies not required to operate the business and ensure there is a system for destroying useless records or retiring inactive records thus stabilizing the growth of records in all formats. Recordkeeping requires money for filing equipment, space in offices, and staffing to maintain an organized filing system or to search for lost records when there is no organized and effective system. Implementing a records management program provides an opportunity to affect some cost savings in space and equipment and to utilize staff more productively.

There are various practices in the management of records. These practices are also referred to records management processes. The processes are: records capture/creation, records classification, records storage, records preservation, records security and records disposal.

Records Creation

Record creation simply refers to the establishment of records. Records are not borne out of thin air, they are created from actual happenings. Record creation stage is the first stage in the life cycle of records management, and as such care should be taken, because the level of success attained in this stage may affect the other stages of the record life cycle. The creation of records must be properly captured on an appropriate medium after creation so that they are readily available for institutional support. In government ministries, a record is either received or created, the creation of a record starts when a letter is produced, an e-mail is written, a form is completed or a pamphlet is printed in any government ministry or non-governmental organization, as every unit of the ministry needs records in order to attain efficiency and effectiveness.

Records classification

Records are filed in order to make its retrieval at when needed easy. Record filing involves sorting each record created or received and taking a proper documentation of such records. Records may be organized based on their level of importance, their usability in the day to day administration of the organization. They can also be classified in a manner which reflects the nature of their creation. According to International Records Management Trust (1999) 'classification' organizes records into categories, based on the functions and activities the records represent, so that decisions about their organization, storage, transfer and disposal

may be made on a category-wide basis, not file by file or item by item. Records can be filed using different benchmarks such as numeric, alpha-numeric, alphabetical or chronological. Notably, there is no generally accepted method of record filing as most organizations tend to adopt methods of filing which aligns with their modus operandi and ensure administrative conveniences.

Records Storage

The second phase in the records life cycle is the storage of records. Records should be stored in such a manner so as to facilitate user access and ensure that they are protected from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, removal, deterioration, loss or destruction. An organization should lay down guidelines on the storage of records including sensitive or classified records. This involves preparing and placing records into their proper storage place and when a request is made for it, it must be quickly retrieved from storage for use. For records in paper form, organizations should note that paper deteriorates rapidly in an environment of high temperature and humidity. A study by Ojo (2009) on health information management indicated that records that are managed effectively eliminate cases of missing files, increase physical filing space, reduce lengthy turnaround time in retrieving files and lengthy patient waiting time. It also assists in tracking the movement of paper records in public health institutions. Unegbu and Adenike (2013) in their study noted that records at the Ministry of Information and Strategy in Nigeria kept their records safe on Compact Disks and flash drives. When records are no longer active that is they are no longer needed for active use they may be stored and protected using appropriate equipment and environment and human controls to ensure record security (Chirwa, 2014). However, Nabombe (2012) raised concerns that the registries might be unable to sustain the digitized system due to the rate at which equipment and software become obsolete and fail to migrate digitized records to other media formats such as magnetic and optical media as a preservation measure.

Preservation and Disaster Management

The reason for preserving records is to protect them from injurious factors such as excess heat or lighting, fire break outs and humidity and prolong their life span. The issue of disaster control and preparedness is another issue that is not taken seriously in Nigeria as revealed in the few available literature. According to Odeyemi, Issa and Saka, (2011), the reason for preserving records is to protect them from injurious factors such as excess heat or lighting, fire breakouts and humidity and prolong their life span. Disaster management plan is a formal written plan, on the basis of identified potential accidents together with their

consequences, describes how such accidents and their consequences should be handled either on site or off site. Disaster management also known as disaster preparedness is regarded as an essential part of any records management programme. Disaster management ensures that organizations are prepared to respond quickly to emergencies. Disaster mitigation, or the ability to identify risks and prevent some emergencies from happening, should always play a key role in an institution's emergency preparedness and planning efforts. For instance Akor and Udensi (2014) carried out a study on the assessment of records management system in the establishment division of two universities in Nigeria. The study found out that there is no policy on records management practices and no disaster preparedness in case of any disaster

Records security

Security issues in most public organizations like the ministries should follow traditional norms. Safety measures such as locking cabinets, employing security personnel, cameras, Closed Circuit Television (CCTVs), alarm systems, fire warnings and protection systems are mostly taken for the physical security of records. On the other hand, electronic security measures such as such as firewalls, passwords, encryption, security copies and access rights for each user category are some of the tools used for securing electronic records integrity, accuracy and trustworthiness. In most government ministries, vital records are filed in a secure location that is locked to safeguard against loss, tampering, or use by unauthorized personnel. Records managers and personnel must take reasonable steps to protect the personal and confidential information it holds from misuse and loss and from unauthorized access and modification or disclosure. This is very essential in institutions like the ministries where on daily basis, confidential records are created and maintained. Access rights in organizations are stipulated by the management that prescribes who is authorized or mandated to access confidential and non-confidential records. The lack of security controls in organizations exposes the organization to lose private and confidential records about the individuals and the organization as a whole.

Disposition of Records

Disposition of records is the third phase in the records life cycle. Record destruction may not necessarily imply the utter destruction of records. After records have been retained for a long or short time, depending on the level of vitality of the record, records are then put away either through physical and complete destruction or by transferring or moving it to a permanent

storage site within the organization or to an external records storage facility called archive. Notably, it is part of the responsibilities of the management to decide the fate of records which no longer serve the organization, that is, the actual destruction of records which no longer serve the company to pave way for useful ones. In a study by Abioye (2014) on court records management and efficient administration of justice in Nigeria, the study found that there was no coordinated records disposal program leading to accumulation of records, a situation which made retrieval of records difficult and stressful. The study equally revealed that appraisal of records was rarely undertaken as records were disposed of after conclusion of court cases without any form of appraisal. It is important to use appraisal techniques to support decisions about retention, that is which record can be destroyed and which record merit longer term or indefinite retention.

Records Retention Schedule

A retention and disposal schedule refers to the document that prescribes the length of time that ministry records are to be retained and disposal action when this time has been reached. It is also known as disposal list, disposition schedule, records schedule, retention schedule, or transfer schedule. Records Retention is the length of time set for retaining records before disposal by the government body. Balasu (2009) investigated the use of records retention schedule in the public sector in Ghana, the findings of the study show that there is no public sector organization in Ghana that applies an agency specific schedule as they are not in existence. Balasu explains that the absence of an agency specific schedule is a serious weakness in the governments' disposition infrastructure. In another study by Abdulrahman (2015) on the management of records for effective administration of universities in North Central, Nigeria, it was discovered that no standard policy on retention and disposal of records.

Vital Records

Vital Records refers to a record facility where items like legal documents of an organization, title deeds, major contracts, property plans, minutes of certain meetings, insurance policies among others are stored away safely for future use. Vital records by inclination are often irreplaceable and should be treated with utmost carefulness, and as such adequate measures are put in place in order to safeguard these categories of document from every form of destruction or damage be it fire, burglary, insect attack among others, as these documents can make or mar the continual existence of such an organization, hence they should never be

destroyed. In asserting the degree of significance a vital record is to an organization, Massey University Records Management policy (2013) opined that, vital records embody those records whose absence can bring the continual existence and operation of an organization to a halt, as they contain information which are essential in re-establishing the organization in the event of a disaster which destroys all other records in the organization.

Staff Development

Records management has been described as a profession that is constantly evolving. This has implications on the skills and competencies needed to manage records. Training should be an ongoing activity for all staff involved in the management of records from their creation to their destruction or preservation. Whilst records management requires that records designers and creators be imparted with some levels of skills in the management of records, the records professionals require an upgrade of their skills that they apply in the course of their work. Unfortunately, those entrusted with the management of records are not equipped with the necessary skills and know-how to ensure that records are managed and preserved in a state that will make it accessible in organizations such as government agencies and ministries. The International Records Management Trust (2004) declared that public officials in various organizations lack the requisite skills concerning the nature of records and record keeping, and about why they need to exist, why they need to be managed, and what their responsibilities are for the management of such records over time.

Theoretical Framework

The Records Life Cycle Model perceives records as an analogy of a biological organism, which is born, lives and dies, and a record, which is created, maintained and used for as long as it has continuing value and is then disposed of either by destruction or by archival. The features of the records life cycle model imply that the model is more applicable and suitable for organizations dealing with the management of paper records. The life cycle model has been shown by researchers not to be suitable for organizations or studies investigating the management of electronic records. The perceived weaknesses of the records life cycle model led to the development of the records continuum model.

The records continuum model originated in Canada but was developed and adopted in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s by Australian archival theorist, Frank Upward (Bantin,

2002). In the continuum model, records are seen as a continuous process, from creation to disposition, without a clear cut demarcation in transition from one record phase to the other. McKemmish (2010) asserts that records continuum model brings together records managers and archivists under an integrated recordkeeping framework with the same goal: to guarantee the reliability, authenticity, and completeness of records. A records continuum perspective can be contrasted with the life cycle model. The life cycle model argues that there are clearly definable stages in record-keeping and creates a sharp distinction between current and historical record-keeping. The record continuum, on the other hand, has provided records managers and archivists with a way of thinking about the integration of record-keeping and archiving processes. The life cycle model sees records passing through stages until they eventually 'die', except for the 'chosen ones' that are reincarnated as archives.

In recent time, the act of records management has been simplified and made more efficient through the advent of modern technological gadgets and devices such as computers, video, audio tape and film. These devices have the capacity to accommodate large volumes of records, and have also dealt with the bottlenecks which encumbered the processes of record keeping in the ancient time, thus allowing the process of record creation, processing, organizing and retrieval to be done at a speed of light. Irrespective of these developments, paper record storage still remains the most predominantly used in most government establishments.

Methods and Procedure

Survey research method was used to carry out this research because of its large population. Nworgu (2006) attested that a survey research is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. The total population of the study was 526 senior staff of the ministry of health, Abia State. In order to determine the sample size for the study, 20% of the total population was used. This is in line with Nwana's (1981) formula which states that, if a population is in many hundreds, one need a sample size of 20%, but if a population is a few thousands, one needs a sample size of 10%, and for a population of several thousands, one needs a sample of 5% or less. The instrument used for collecting data for this study was questionnaire. The instrument was face-validated by presenting it to three experts in the field of Library and Information Science. These experts were requested to examine the clarity of

expression used as well as the appropriateness of language. The researcher administered and collected the questionnaire from the respondents. 85 out of the 105 questionnaires were returned. Thus there was an 81% rate of returns of the questionnaires distributed. The data for the study was presented in tables and analysed using simple percentage method of statistics.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Out of the 105 copies of the questionnaires that were administered to the staff of the ministry of Health, 85 (81%) were retrieved. The data from the retrieved questionnaires are hereby presented using simple statistics like frequencies and percentages.

Demographic distribution of the respondents

Out of the 85 respondents, 59(69%) of the respondents were female while, 26 (31%) of the respondents were male. This shows a high population of females.

Procedures to Manage Records

Do you have developed procedures in place to manage records?

Table 1. Procedures to Manage Records (n=85)

Developed Procedures in Place?	N	%
NO	56	66
YES	29	34
Total	85	100

The ministry does not have a well-developed procedure for managing records. A high proportion of respondents, that is, 66% of the respondents, reported that the Ministry of Health had not yet developed procedures to capture, manage and store paper and electronic records in a proper and secure manner as compared to 34% of respondents who did agree.

Procedures on the Creation and Capture of Records

The researcher further sought to find out whether the Ministry of Health issued guidelines and procedures on the creation and capture of those records that are necessary to meet operational, fiscal, legal and other requirements. More than half 63.5% of the respondents said such procedures and guidelines did not exist while 36.5% of the respondents concurred that the guidelines and procedures were in place (See Table 2).

Table 2: Procedures on the Creation and Capture of Records (n=85)

Procedures on the creation and capture of records?	n	%
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NO	54	63.5
YES	31	36.5
Total	85	100

Security Measures on Record Management

Respondents were asked whether the Ministry of Health had put in place adequate security measures to protect records from unauthorised access and to prevent unauthorised and accidental loss or destruction of records. Table 3 shows that a high proportion 70.6% of the respondents reported that the Ministry of Health had not put in place adequate security measures to protect records from unauthorised access and prevent unauthorised and accidental loss or destruction while 29.4% of the respondents said the security measures were in place.

Table 3: Security Measures on Records Management (n=85)

Security Measures in place	N	%
NO	60	70.6
YES	25	29.4
Total	85	100

Records Management Manual in Place for the Guidance of Managing Records

The researcher further sought to know whether the Ministry of Health had a records management manual in place to guide the management of records. Table 4 shows that a high proportion 77% of the respondents said there were no such manual while 22.4 % said the ministry had a manual.

Table 4 Records Management Manual in Place for the Guidance of Managing Records (n=85)

Records management manual in place?	N	%
NO	66	77.6
YES	19	22.4
Total	85	100

Records Management Legislation

The researcher sought to know whether there were pieces of legislation and regulations that guide the management of records in the Ministry of Health. The finding shows that more than half 58.9% of the respondents said that such regulations existed as opposed to 41.1% of the respondents.

Table 5: Legislation and Guidelines for Records Management (n=85)

Legislation and guidelines for records management?	n	%
NO	35	41.1
YES	50	58.9
Total	85	100

Records Management Policy

Respondents were asked whether the Ministry of Health has a written records management policy. Table 6 shows that most of the respondents 69.4% said there was no records management policy while 30.6% of the respondents said there was records management policy. The results shows poor records management practice.

Table 6 Records Management Policy (n=85)

Records management Policy?	N	%
NO	59	69.4
YES	26	30.6
Total	85	100

Challenges Facing the Ministry of Health Records Management

The last objective sought to find out the challenges faced by Ministry of Health Personnel in the management of records. Table 7 gives a summary of challenges facing the Ministry of Health personnel in the management of records. More respondents 20.7% identified lack of records management policy as the major challenge, followed by lack of adequate professionally trained record managers (18.2%). Other challenges stated were lack of records retention and disposition schedule/ policy, improper security for records, lack of filing manual/finding aids and inadequate storage equipment.

Table 7. Challenges facing the Ministry of Health records management (n = 85)

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of records retention and disposition schedule/ policy	43	12
Lack of Records management policy	74	20.7
Improper security for records	44	12.3
Lack of adequate professionally trained record Managers	65	18.2
Lack of Filing Manual/Finding Aids and Involvement of manual operations	32	8.9
Inadequate storage equipment	36	10
Negative attitude in the system e.g. laziness, absenteeism, mediocrity etc.	25	7
Lack of back up facilities for ICT	38	10.6

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was carried out using the Abia State Ministry of Health. 20% of the total population was chosen as the sample size. The total number of respondents sampled was 105 out of which 85 questionnaire were retrieved. Lack of records management policy and absence of specific and general retention schedules are some of the challenges facing the Ministry in the management of records.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it is clear that records at the Ministry of Health are not managed in accordance with best practices. The findings revealed that the Ministry of Health had not yet developed systems to manage records resulting to poor records management practices. Examples are; absence of specific and general retention/disposal schedules to facilitate preservation or destruction of records, lack of procedural manuals, lack of records management policies and lack of uniform guidelines on how to handle electronic records among others.

Recommendation

The study identified various issues which affect records management at the Ministry of Health. The study therefore makes the following recommendations to address the issues identified. The recommendations are in line with the study objectives.

- Urgent step should be taken by the authorities concerned to conduct a records survey in order to carry out records appraisal, develop retention and disposal schedules, create records management procedures, prepare a disaster recovery and vital records plan.
- Records management policy should be put in place to enhance records management activities within the Ministry of Health.
- There is need to have standards in place to identify best practices.
- Training programmes on records management should be organized for staff of the Ministry of Health.

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