

E-HEALTH AND TELEMEDICINE PRACTICE IN NIGERIA (1999-2017): CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Background: One of the global milestones in medicine is e-Health – which is about leveraging on ICT to deliver efficient health care services to citizens. Nigeria with poor infant and maternal indices, poor physical infrastructures and scarce health practitioners is expected to leverage on the potentials of e-health to strengthen the country's health service delivery by fully adopting the right policy framework for ICT in the health.

Objectives: To assess the extent of adoption and practice of e-health and telemedicine in the country between 1999 and 2017; and the current benefits, challenges and prospects of implementing them in Nigeria.

Method: Relevant literatures were reviewed from medical journals, textbooks, library search, Yahoo and Google search and internet scientific publications.

Results: Although e-health and telemedicine were introduced in Nigeria about the year 1999 and 2007 respectively; it was not until 18 years later, that the e-Health Steering committee and the National e-Health Strategic Framework document were inaugurated and produced respectively. Recent assessments of e-health growth showed that Nigeria has moved from an early adoption (experimentation) stage to developing and building up stage. The implementation of e-health initiatives in the country has been largely piecemeal and uncoordinated; and existing pilots were rarely scaled-up. Most e-health initiatives witnessed were largely delivered by the private sector. Underfunding, inadequate human resource capacity, poor electric power supply and internet connectivity, low level of awareness of e-health and its benefits, are among the main challenges of e-health in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendation: Nigeria is yet to enthrone a full utilization of e-health to maximize its benefits especially in strengthening Nigeria's healthcare system. For an effective adoption and sustainability of e-health in the country there should be provision of adequate power supply, effective broad band internet connectivity, improved funding of e-health, continuous stakeholders' education, and incorporation of e-health and telemedicine into medical/health training curriculum.

KEYWORDS: E-Health, Telemedicine, Practice, Benefits, Challenges, Prospects, Nigeria

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