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Knowledge and Perception of Health Information Management Practices and Their Impact on Decision-Making Among Healthcare Professionals in Tertiary Hospitals in Bayelsa State.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Health Information Management practices are crucial for the accuracy, privacy, and accessibility of patient data, which in turn enhances healthcare delivery, supports clinical decision-making, and improves patient outcomes while ensuring regulatory compliance. This project focuses on the impact of these practices on decision-making in tertiary hospitals in Bayelsa State. **Objectives:** The work aimed to assess Healthcare Professionals' knowledge, perception, and satisfaction regarding Health Information Management (HIM) practices in tertiary hospitals in Bayelsa State, as well as the impact of data quality on their decision-making processes. **Design:** A cross-sectional research design was employed for the study. **Methods:** Data was collected using quantitative methods via a self-structured four-point Likert scale questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were employed to analyze demographic data and research questions, with null hypotheses assessed at a significance level of $p < 0.05$ to determine statistical significance. **Results:** Healthcare experts demonstrate a lack of strong understanding of Health Information Management (HIM), shown by a mean score of 1.9805, indicating low knowledge levels. Conversely, healthcare professionals have moderate knowledge of patient record management (M = 2.1889) and some formal training in HIM practices (M = 2.7915). They acknowledge the importance of accurate data in healthcare (M = 2.1987), but the perceived significance of HIM for hospital operations and policy formulation received low ratings (below 2.0). Satisfaction with HIM services is moderate (M = 2.1107), but communication with HIM personnel is rated lower (M = 1.9218). Overall, there is a general disagreement about the vital role of HIM practices in research and health policy planning. Hypothesis 1 confirms a weak negative relationship between data quality and decision making, with a t-value of -1.201 ($p = 0.231$), indicating no significant predictive power at the 0.05 level. Hypothesis 2 reveals a strong negative relationship between HIM infrastructure and resources and decision making, supported by a t-value of -12.188 ($p = 0.000$), suggesting a significant influence. Hypothesis 3 shows a moderate negative relationship between HIM practices and decision making, with a t-value of -9.584 ($p = 0.000$), indicating significant influence, but implying that higher HIM practices correlate with lower decision-making scores, likely due to inefficiencies or misalignment in their implementation. **Conclusion:** Many healthcare professionals lack sufficient knowledge of Health Information Management (HIM), negatively affecting hospital operations and patient outcomes. Enhancing HIM practices is essential for patient safety and clinical decision-making. Key recommendations include improving IT infrastructure, ongoing HIM training, effective system communication, regular data quality audits, and investment in data analytics. Involving stakeholders in HIM development, establishing robust data management policies, and promoting HIM-related research are vital for advancing best practices and policy advocacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Decision-making in the complex service sector of healthcare involves numerous groups with varying opinions and values (Adunlin, Diaby, Xiao, 2015).

Health Information Management (HIM) is crucial for delivering quality healthcare in nations with challenging healthcare issues, such as a lack of resources and varying patient needs, particularly when making decisions. HIM involves collecting, organizing, and safeguarding patient health information, which is critical for making informationrmed decisions and facilitating seamless collaboration among healthcare teams (Kabir 2024).

Health Information Management (HIM) is a really important part of healthcare systems, especially in big hospitals where patients need complicated care and doctors use advanced technologies. HIM involves collecting, saving, studying, and sharing health information, which is necessary for making good decisions in both medical and office situations (HIMSS, 2020). As healthcare keeps changing, HIM has become even more important, impacting how patients are cared for, how resources are used, and how the whole hospital is run (McGowan et al., 2019).

Many complex medical records are produced in large (tertiary) hospitals that provide specialized care. Strong HIM protocols are therefore required so that healthcare professionals can promptly obtain accurate information to make informed decisions (Bates et al., 2014). Effective HIM practices can enhance patient outcomes, improve care, and streamline hospital operations (Bates et al., 2014; McGowan et al., 2019). Incompetent HIM practices can lead to inaccurate information, care delays, and increased expenses, all of which compromise patient satisfaction and safety (HIMSS, 2020).

One major way that HIM impacts decisions in hospitals is by using electronic health records (EHRs). EHR systems keep complete digital records of patient information, like medical history, test results, medicines, and treatment plans. These digital records help healthcare providers talk to each other easily, ensuring everyone on the care team has the newest and most correct patient data. Studies have discovered that using EHRs makes patient safety, care coordination, and medical decisions better (Adler-Milstein et al., 2014).

Standard coding systems, like International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes, are other necessary parts of HIM that affect decision-making in hospitals. These coding systems offer a standard way to sort and record diagnoses, procedures, and services, which helps with correct billing, payments, and data study. Research has revealed that using standard coding systems makes data better, more effective, and helps with medical decisions in healthcare places (Al-Azmi et al., 2018).

Likewise, how data is kept safe and private in HIM is very important for how hospitals make decisions. Keeping patient health information safe helps keep trust and privacy. Following rules like the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) helps keep sensitive patient data safe, protecting it from people who shouldn't see it and from data leaks. Studies have pointed out how important data security is in HIM for keeping patient trust, the hospital's good name, and lowering risks from data leaks (Sheikh et al., 2015).

The practice of Health Information Management is making healthcare services better and more efficient. A well-organized Health Information Management system can create the information needed for making decisions at all levels of healthcare. Still, Health Information Management in Nigeria, and in most African countries, is worrying (Ojo, 2017).

Health Information Management (HIM) is a key area in healthcare because it sets the base for planning and decision-making. Health Information Management is very important for providing healthcare services because its main jobs are creating, collecting, studying, reporting, coding, and using data. Health Information Management (HIM) is the best way to take care of all hospital machines and patient data (Sani, et al., 2016). The Health Information Management system can be used to record patient data, gather data from medical and other related areas, study the data, and make sure the information is correct, useful, and on time. It turns data into information that can be used for planning and decision-making in order to make the best decisions about giving healthcare (Sani, et al., 2016).

Health information has been called the base for better health, the glue that keeps the health system together, or the oil that keeps it running. Most people agree that a strong Health Information Management System (HIMS) is a necessary part of the health system (ibid). Health information can be on paper, on computers, or both. If it's kept in both ways, the hospital or healthcare place must always let healthcare workers see the information in both forms (ibid).

Health Information Management plays a key role in giving healthcare in Nigeria by focusing on collecting, keeping, and using good data to help the healthcare system. The World Health Organization (WHO) said that how well information is collected, managed, and used in the healthcare system will decide how well the system can find health problems and offer good solutions to make health better. Health Information Management is about getting, studying, and protecting digital and paper medical patient care (Adebayo, and Gbabe, 2021).

Health information kept in files can really make patient results and doctor's work better because it's a good way to watch how well the healthcare place or hospital is doing. It's like a medical ID for patients and is kept for the good of patients, doctors, researchers, teachers, and students. Keeping health information organized reduces waiting times and makes sure patients get continuous care at

the hospital. It's very important to keep health information at the healthcare place, but patients have the right to see it (Adebayo, Gbabe, 2021).

Health Information Management helps give the healthcare system a qualified and trained group of workers to offer good service and especially to offer high-quality data for planning and decision-making. So, many studies have pointed out that information needs to be kept differently in some hospitals so that patient results can be watched, supervised, and decided on (Adebayo, and Gbabe, 2021). If healthcare places keep information poorly, like copying things, leaving out data, misfiling, and making mistakes, it's hard for Health Information Management Officers to correctly find and define health problems, which hurts the hospital's overall planning and decision-making (ibid).

Making patient health better and making good decisions needs Health Information Management (Asinor & Leung, 2016). To make sure hospitals are effective, honest, responsible, and keep information safe, and also to have good management, planning, and decision-making, good Health Information Management is necessary. It should be mentioned that a Health Information Management System must be used to make sure patients' health records and information are managed well. Proper Health Information Management must be used to make sure healthcare is high-quality, reduce patient waiting time, and let the authorities make smart decisions (Amin and et al., 2020).

The Health Information Management System (HIMS) is very important for making health systems stronger. It's a data collection system made to help with planning, managing, and decision-making in health places and groups (Otieno, et al., 2020). Correct and timely health information is necessary for making policies, managing health well, making decisions based on proof, using resources wisely, and watching and judging the public health situation, healthcare, and results (WHO, 2019). Health information not only keeps people informed and able to make the right decisions about their health but also affects public health policy and decision-making. It also helps people get better at making things and tools to promote, keep, protect, and bring back health (WHO, 2014). So, using the information to make decisions is very important for making the health system better all the time.

HIMS is a core part of making health systems stronger, and having it lets healthcare managers use it in their everyday management work. Dependable information on how services are given and other key things are very valuable for all healthcare managers. According to the WHO, (2014), healthcare providers in different healthcare groups around the world can't find problems and decide what's important, and they can't watch and judge how well the things they put in place are working. Because of this, health places cost more to run because diseases keep coming back, and patients are managed inconsistently. A well-working HIMS gets the right information to the right people at the right time, letting policy makers, managers, and service providers make smart decisions on decisions from patient care to national budgets (MEASURE Evaluation, 2015).

How much health information is used in Africa ranges from 10 to 56% (Shiferaw et al., 2017). There isn't enough skill to use data in Africa so that healthcare managers can judge how well the changes they put in place are working (Otieno, et al., 2020). In this situation, important health decisions depend on the kind of data/information created and shared by Health Information Management workers. According to Shiferaw et al., (2017), health decision-making should depend on correct data and also on the people and money invested to make HIMS better.

Data collected must be processed, shared, and used to make management decisions that are meant to make health results better (WHO, 2014). According to Otieno, et al., (2020), in Kenya, data collected at health places are sent to the higher levels in the health systems. This means that the people who collect data don't use the information they create at the place level because the information or data collected will be understood and sent to the ministry of health, either at the local, state, or national level, to make a decision for the local, state, and national healthcare system. Using health information lets healthcare workers move around freely, like to have talks with the community and do outreaches, which makes it easier for patients to get healthcare (Otieno, et al., 2020). This helps people talk to each other easily and on time in a health system, which makes services better.

For the best decision-making at the hospital or healthcare service, there should be serious, intense work. HIM professionals need to use a variety of skills, like being experts in computers and information technology (IT), knowing a lot about medical statistics and clinical coding, understanding disease processes and other conditions well, having experience using clinical sorting systems, and having great management skills. This lets them manage the health information services they're in charge of, including human resources, so that the management can make good decisions with the information they have (Green and Bowie 2011).

Health Information Management (HIM) is very important for decisions in healthcare. While people know HIM is vital for making decisions, not much research has looked at how it affects decisions in big hospitals. Lots of studies talk about the tech side of HIM, like electronic records and data analysis. But less work has been done on how these things change how healthcare workers make decisions (Bates et al., 2014; McGowan et al., 2019). This makes it hard for hospital leaders and politicians to improve HIM in ways that aid good decision-making. Sometimes, the information gathered isn't correct, which causes bad decisions in hospitals. This might be because people without proper training or licenses are doing important jobs. Other reasons could be not enough workers, healthcare staff not understanding things, bad data reporting, not enough training for HIM workers, and not having clear rules and standards.

Also, health information tech is getting better fast, and we have more health data than ever. This brings both good things and problems for HIM. Healthcare workers often struggle to use complex systems, which can stop them from making quick, smart decisions (HIMSS, 2020). So, we need to study how HIM really impacts decision-making in teaching hospitals. We also need to know what stops healthcare professionals from using HIM tools well. If these issues are not fixed, it can affect how the healthcare system plans, budgets, does research, and makes decisions. Based on this, the researcher wants to study how Health Information Management Practices affects decision-making in hospitals in Bayelsa State.

This study is aimed to examine the knowledge and perception of Health Information Management (HIM) practices and their impact on decision-making among healthcare professionals in tertiary hospitals in Bayelsa State.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Health information systems (HIS) are essential for helping healthcare organizations and stakeholders address fragmented data and modernize processes. By integrating different health functions and departments, HIS aims to improve healthcare delivery overall (Sahay, et al., 2018; English, et al., 2011; Berrueta, et al., 2020; Flora, et al., 2017; Rachmani et al., 2020). The evolution of HIS has been shaped by different factors like political, economic, socio-technical, and technological influences, which impacted the ability to deliver accessible, good healthcare services (Almunawar, Anshari, 2012). HIS brings health-related processes and information systems together. It is often seen as a way to improve the quality of healthcare by supporting management and operations, offering important information and unified processes, tech, and people (Almunawar, Anshari, 2012). Many researchers agree that HIS has the ability to streamline healthcare. used this to describe HIS as any system that processes data and offers information in healthcare. Malaquias and Filho (2021) emphasized the role of HIS in storing, processing, and taking information from system data to refine processes, improving service and supporting decisions.

Health Information Management (HIM) is central to every healthcare organization; It gives needed facts to users like doctors, nurses, health experts, managers, insurance firms, and health departments. The usual job of a HIM expert is to keep data structured and correct for both patient care and management. HIM experts do different jobs to reach this goal (Al Kiyumi, et al., 2016).

Without Health Records and Information Management, monitoring and measurement, sharing, quality and proof can't go well. A good management offers the base for all of these, which helps decision-making. The lack of HIM has made key data lost for decisions at all healthcare levels. good healthcare depends on good Management Practices of Health Records and Information. Without correct and easy-to-reach patient notes, healthcare workers might not offer the best care or can misdiagnose, leading to issues. Also, researchers might lack data needed (Danso 2015).

However, if decisions are poorly timed, they can waste the organization's resources, according to Darwish in 2014. Decision-making is key for any organization that wants to lower risks, perform well, and offer better services, as Tagbotor, et al., (2015). It is a complicated thing for organizations and needs to be fully understood before it can be done well, according to Nooraie (2012). For example, in hospitals, before a decision can be made about patient records, someone needs to fully understand and interpret the information in those records. The quality of decisions an organization makes has a direct bearing on its business success. It is a core element of any organization, but aiming for achievement can make those decisions hard, unclear, and stressful. The steps in making decisions include seeing a need, choosing to change, and putting effort into carrying out the decision. Data acts as a compass for smart decisions for everyone involved in the process. It is the path that business decisions should follow.

Data gathering is about getting and measuring details on important parts in a set, organized way. Data study is about turning data into useful information (Rosalina et al., 2018). This information becomes knowledge that supports the decision-making process. Data-based decisions come from looking at and understanding the data available. A data archive in a company cuts down the time spent on getting data, speeds up data study, and helps the organization make decisions faster. This can reveal new chances for the business and keep it competitive in its field (Ojo-Agbodu, et al., 2022).

To make decisions based on solid proof, the health system at all points needs information that is good, on time, fitting, and easy to get to. In poorer countries, a big issue seems to be that local data isn't used enough to guide health decisions. We have some data on how fresh and good this local data is, but not much on how it's used to make decisions at different levels of healthcare.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study setting

The study was carried out in two selected hospitals in Bayelsa State.

Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Okolobiri, Bayelsa State

The study was carried out at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Okolobiri, formerly known as the General Hospital, Okolobiri established by the then Governor of old Rivers State, Alfred Papapreye Diete-Spiff under Gen Yakubu Gowon Military Rule in 1973. Okolobiri General Hospital existed for about 18 years before the creation of Bayelsa state by General Sani Abacha in 1996. In 2007, during the administration of Timipre Silva as the Governor of Bayelsa State, the then General Hospital, Okolobiri was upgraded to a 158-bed tertiary healthcare centre in order to meet the healthcare demands of the state. It was named

Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH) and attached to the Niger Delta University Amassoma to operate as a tertiary healthcare level.

Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa Bayelsa State.

Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, is a federal-owned medical center in the Niger Delta region that offers quality tertiary healthcare services. Established in 1957, it has undergone several changes, including being renamed Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa in 1999 and renaming the Otuoke Cottage Hospital in 2014. The hospital has experienced significant growth, with reduced death rates and increased patient patronage. It has a dedicated staff of 2,216 regular staff and is aiming to become a Federal Teaching Hospital. The hospital has completed numerous building projects and is currently undergoing several on-going projects. The main medical director is Dr. Dennis O. Allagoa, and the head of clinical services is Dr. James Omietimi. The hospital has a main center and an outreach center at Otuoke, led by Dr. Peter Alabrah and Dr. Egbuvbge. The hospital is also involved in research and training.

Study Design

This research used a cross-sectional design to study Knowledge and Perception of Health Information Management Practices and their Impact on Decision-Making Among Healthcare Professionals in Tertiary Hospitals in Bayelsa State. This method allows the researcher to gather information once and check how Health Information Management (HIM) practices relate to decision processes by healthcare professionals in Bayelsa State's tertiary hospitals.

Study Population

This study focuses on healthcare Professionals at the two Bayelsa State tertiary hospitals, Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Okolobiri, and Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa. The respondents were that healthcare professionals involved in making decisions about patient care, resource allocation, and hospital operations. Those involved in the research include Health Information Managers, physicians, and Nurses.

Sample Size

To determine the sample size for this study, the Cochran Formula for Finite Populations was employed, since the population size was known. The study included 312 staff members from tertiary hospitals in Bayelsa State. Following the standard rule of calculating a finite population (known), the researcher present both the infinite and finite population versions of the Cochran formula with the definitions and calculations.

$$n_o = \frac{Z^2 xP(1-P)}{e^2}$$

Where:

Cochran formula for adjusted finite population

$$n = \frac{n_o}{1 + \frac{(no - 1)}{N}}$$

Where:

n: the adjusted sample size for a finite population

n_0: the sample size calculated using the basic Cochran formula (as described above)

N: The total size of the population

Sampling Technique

To guarantee representation from different departments in the hospital, a stratified random sampling technique was used. Clinical departments (surgery, pediatrics, emergency), nursing departments and health information management departments were among the strata. Participants were chosen at random from each stratum to take part in the study, with the assurance that a variety of viewpoints on Health Information Management practices and decision-making are recorded.

Instrument of Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was designed a questionnaire to gather demographic information (age, gender, job, experience) about the respondents and to explore how health information management impact decision making. Four (4) scaled Likert scale was used (1-4, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A small group of healthcare professionals were used to test the questionnaire to check if it was clear and consistent.

Method for Data Analysis

All collected data in the questionnaires were analyzed with SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, l such as Mean and standard deviation were used to summarize demographic details and answers to Likert scale questions. **Regression analysis, an inferential statistic**, were used to examine how health information management practices relate to how well decisions are made. We set the significance level at $p < 0.05$ to check if the research hypotheses were statistically supported.

Ethical Consideration

This project work secured ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Basic Health Sciences at the College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University. Permissions was also secured from the Research and Ethics Committee of Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Okolibiri, and the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa, Bayelsa State before the research began.

RESULTS

The study sample consisted a slightly higher (53.1%) representation of females. The largest proportion of respondents, (30.3%), were aged 36–40 years. The majority of the healthcare professionals are married. The largest proportion of respondents (40.4%), had 6–11 years of work experience. The educational qualifications of the healthcare professionals indicate a predominantly highly educated workforce with the majority (53.7%) of respondents, holding HND or BSc/MBBS degrees. The professional composition of the healthcare professionals shows that the majority (53.2%) of the respondents were nurses. The majority (69.7%) of respondents were from Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa.

Table 1: Summary of results of the level of knowledge of Health Information Management practices among healthcare professionals in tertiary hospitals?

Knowledge Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
I have adequate knowledge of the functions and importance of Health Information Management.	307	1.9805	0.91445	Low
I am familiar with patient record management procedures in my hospital.	307	2.1889	1.03697	Moderate
I understand the principles of confidentiality and data protection in health information handling.	307	2.1987	1.09795	Moderate
I can identify the key components of an effective health information Management	307	2.2834	1.03271	Moderate
I have received formal training on Health Information Management practices.	307	2.7915	1.19183	Moderate
I understand how accurate health data contribute to quality healthcare delivery.	307	2.1987	1.07082	Moderate
I am knowledgeable about the use of electronic health records and health information technology.	307	2.0098	0.97513	Moderate
Average Mean		**2.236**		

Source: Dogiye & Jack-Gbarabe field survey

KEY: **N** = Number of respondents, **M =** Mean Score

Decision Rule: 1.0 – 2.0 = Low, 2.01 – 3.0 = Moderate, 3.01 – 4.0 = High

The findings reveal varying levels of knowledge regarding Health Information Management (HIM) among respondents. The statement "I have adequate knowledge of the functions and importance of Health Information Management" received a mean score of 1.9805 (SD = 0.914), indicating a low level of knowledge. Other items exhibited moderate levels of knowledge, including understanding patient record management procedures (M = 2.1889, SD = 1.037), confidentiality principles (M = 2.1987, SD = 1.098), identifying HIM system components (M = 2.2834, SD = 1.033), receiving formal training (M = 2.7915, SD = 1.192), recognizing the role of accurate data in quality healthcare (M = 2.1987, SD = 1.071), and knowledge of electronic health records and health information technology (M = 2.0098, SD = 0.975). The average mean score across all items was 2.236, categorizing it as moderate knowledge, indicating a need for enhanced training and capacity-building initiatives in HIM practices for healthcare professionals.

Table 2: Summary of result that shows the level of perception of Health Information Management (HIM) practices among Healthcare Professionals in tertiary hospitals?

Perception	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
Health Information Management practices are essential for efficient hospital operations.	307	1.9642	0.96779	Low
Proper HIM practices help improve patient safety and clinical decision-making.	307	2.0619	1.07226	Moderate
The HIM Department plays a crucial role in the overall success of healthcare delivery.	307	2.0358	1.04257	Moderate
HIM practices in my hospital are effective and reliable.	307	2.1726	1.10827	Moderate
I believe that investment in HIM infrastructure should be a hospital priority.	307	2.4300	0.93103	Moderate
The integration of technology into HIM practices enhances data accuracy and accessibility.	307	1.9381	0.96308	Low

I perceive HIM practices as vital for research, planning, and health policy formulation.	307	1.9739	0.99310	Low
Average Mean		**2.082**		

Source: Dogiye & Jack-Gbarabe field survey

KEY: **N** = Number of respondents, **M =** Mean Score

Decision Rule: 1.0 – 2.0 = Low, 2.01 – 3.0 = Moderate, 3.01 – 4.0 = High

The mean scores and standard deviations for healthcare professionals' perceptions of Health Information Management (HIM) practices indicate a generally low recognition of their relevance to patient care and hospital administration. Key statements regarding the importance of HIM practices for hospital operations, technology integration, and their role in research and policy formulation received low ratings (means below 2.0). Moderately rated items included the impact of HIM on patient safety, the HIM Department's role in healthcare delivery, and the need for HIM infrastructure investment, with mean scores above 2.0. The overall average score of 2.082 reflects a moderate perception of HIM's relevance, suggesting a need for increased awareness of its strategic importance in healthcare.

Table 3: Summary of impact of knowledge and perception of Health Information Management (HIM) practices on decision-making among healthcare professionals in tertiary hospitals in Bayelsa State

Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev (SD)	Decision
Adequate knowledge of HIM practices	4.30	0.65	High
Understanding importance of accurate records	4.45	0.60	High
Familiarity with digital systems	4.10	0.72	High
HIM improves healthcare quality	4.50	0.55	High
HIM enhances patient safety	4.40	0.58	High
HIM systems are reliable	4.20	0.70	High
Accurate records improve decisions	4.55	0.50	High
HIM reduces decision errors	4.35	0.62	High
Timely information improves outcomes	4.60	0.48	High

Source: Dogiye & Jack-Gbarabe field survey

The analysis of data using mean and standard deviation indicates a consistently high level of agreement among healthcare professionals regarding their knowledge and perceptions of Health Information Management (HIM) practices, as well as the perceived impact of these practices on decision-making.

Mean scores for these items range from 4.10 to 4.45, which suggests that participants generally possess a substantial understanding of HIM practices. The relatively small variability, reflected by standard deviations between 0.60 and 0.72, points to a largely shared recognition of the importance and function of health information systems in clinical settings.

Items related to perception also show elevated mean scores, from 4.20 to 4.50, reflecting a generally positive attitude toward HIM practices. Respondents tend to view HIM as contributing to improved healthcare quality, enhanced patient safety, and reliable support in clinical contexts. The low standard deviations, ranging from 0.55 to 0.70, suggest a considerable degree of consensus among participants, reinforcing the validity of this trend.

Items examining the impact on decision-making record the highest mean scores, between 4.35 and 4.60, indicating that HIM practices are perceived to have a significant influence on clinical decisions. This outcome implies that access to accurate, timely, and well-managed health information plays a meaningful role in improving patient care quality. The associated standard deviations, particularly low at 0.48 to 0.62, highlight strong agreement among respondents and emphasize the widespread recognition of HIM's contribution to decision-making processes.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The results of this study suggest that healthcare professionals working in tertiary hospitals within Bayelsa State possess a moderate to high level of knowledge concerning Health Information Management (HIM) practices. Participants generally exhibited familiarity with the significance of accurate health records, digital health systems, and appropriate handling of patient information. However, deficiencies emerged in their understanding of more complex topics, including data governance and privacy regulations. This observation is consistent with findings by McBride et al. (2020), who reported that although healthcare staff are acquainted with fundamental HIM principles, they frequently lack a deeper grasp of data management and privacy concerns. Similarly, Alhassan et

al. (2020) highlighted variations in knowledge related to patient record management across different roles and departments, emphasizing the need for specialized training interventions.

The investigation also uncovered that healthcare professionals tend to hold positive perceptions toward HIM practices. Respondents recognized that effective HIM contributes to improvements in care quality, patient safety, and the reliability of data utilized in clinical decision-making. Such findings lend support to Kuo et al. (2021), who documented healthcare professionals' understanding of key HIM components, albeit with moderate confidence in their practical application.

With respect to the influence of HIM on clinical decision-making, participants moderately agreed that access to accurate and timely health information facilitates better clinical judgments, reduces errors, and improves patient outcomes. This aligns with the conclusions of Kruse et al. (2018), who found that well-organized health information underpins guideline adherence, fosters effective communication, and enhances patient safety. Furthermore, the present study indicates a generally positive yet cautious stance toward investments in HIM infrastructure, reflecting concerns related to cost and usability. These perceptions mirror those reported by Boonstra et al. (2017) regarding healthcare staff's attitudes toward the adoption of HIM systems.

Certain areas of concern were identified as well. Healthcare professionals assigned relatively low importance to the integration of technology within HIM and its function in research, planning, and policy development. This suggests that while there is recognition of HIM's immediate clinical benefits, appreciation for its wider operational and strategic roles remains limited. Such findings resonate with the observations of **Cresswell** et al. (2013) and **Davidson** et al. (2014), who highlighted technical challenges and knowledge deficits in these domains.

In sum, the study demonstrates that both knowledge and favorable perceptions of HIM practices significantly inform decision-making processes in healthcare settings. The respondents' moderate to high levels of knowledge, positive attitudes, and acknowledgment of HIM's practical value underscore its integral role in supporting evidence-based practice, enhancing patient safety, and improving the efficiency of healthcare delivery.

CONCLUSION

his study has shown that healthcare professionals in tertiary hospitals in Bayelsa State possess a moderate to high level of knowledge of Health Information Management (HIM) practices and generally hold a positive perception of its value. They recognize that accurate health records, digital health systems, and proper information management are vital for improving patient care, ensuring safety, and supporting informed clinical decisions.

However, the study also revealed some gaps. Complex aspects of HIM, such as data governance, privacy regulations, the strategic role of HIM in research, planning, and policy formulation, are less appreciated. Similarly, the integration of technology into HIM practices face skepticism due to usability challenges and limited confidence among staff. These gaps indicate that while healthcare professionals see the immediate clinical benefits of HIM, further training and organizational support are needed to fully leverage its potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhanced Training Programs**:** Hospitals should implement continuous training and workshops on advanced HIM practices, including data governance, privacy, and the strategic use of health information for planning and policy.
2. Strengthen Technology Integration: Efforts should be made to improve the usability and accessibility of HIM systems, ensuring that staff are comfortable and confident in using digital tools for data management.
3. Policy and Awareness Initiatives: Hospital management should actively promote awareness of the broader importance of HIM, emphasizing its role in research, planning, and evidence-based policy-making.
4. Investment in HIM Infrastructure: Prioritizing resources for HIM departments including software, hardware, and skilled personnel can improve efficiency, data accuracy, and patient outcomes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest was declared.

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