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New Bachelor's Degree Programme in Health Information Management in Ghana

Emmanuel Kusi Achampong*

Abstract

The introduction of bachelors' programme in health information management is timely in the quest of the country's health managers to improve health outcomes of patients. For the successful management of health information to improve clients/patient outcomes, it is evident that a skilled workforce is required. The Department of Health Information Management at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana is a health information teaching and research institution in Ghana. The department teaches health information management at the bachelors' level and is making preparations to start a programme at the masters' level. The study analysed the state of health information management education in the country. We considered current institutions running a bachelor degree in health information management. Managing health information is crucial in ensuring quality service provision to clients/patients. Health information management has been at the diploma level for many and graduates are unable to further their education for them to professionally manage the different types of health information. The Department of Health Information Management as a new department is making strides to be a leading department in terms of teaching and research. The department seeks to contribute to and improve management of health information through its undergraduate training as well as short courses for medical records professionals as well as health information managers working in the health-related industry. The department also seeks to champion research in health information in the country and ensure that health information policies are influenced by cutting-edge research.

Keywords

Health information management; Department

Introduction

Healthcare institutions in most developing countries are becoming more dependent on information and communication technology (ICT) to support daily healthcare routine [1]. Training motivated, knowledgeable and capable health information managers is important for overcoming the challenges to achieving national and international goals in health service provision [2]. Proper management of health information is important to guarantee quick and reliable access to patient information for healthcare professionals to provide quality

service [3]. It is practically impossible to assure quality service without proper systems in place for managing health information [4].

Information and communication technology (ICT) application in the health sector is rapidly being introduced into the provision of health service in Ghana. The introduction of National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) is making strong arguments for the adoption of ICT into the daily activities of all healthcare institutions.

Management of health information has been left with the untrained due to unavailability of academic institutions specialised in training health information managers. Most managers of health information at the various hospitals are without the requisite qualifications and therefore finds it difficult ensuring proper management of health data/information.

The University of Cape Coast established the Department of Health Information Management, which is the first of its kind in Ghana, to champion the training of professionals to manage health information. The University of Cape Coast is one of the oldest and biggest universities in Ghana. It was established in 1962 in Cape Coast which is the capital of the central region. Currently, the university teaches more than 50,000 students both from on-campus and distance education relatively.

The Department of Health Information Management was established in 2016 for the purpose of training certificate and diploma graduates to professionally manage health information. The department also admits senior high school graduates to pursue the undergraduate programme in health information management. The department seeks to be a leader in teaching and research into health information issues in Ghana. The aim of this paper is to share the objective of this new department and the research interests of the department as well as the teaching methodologies which will be employed.

Health Information Management Education in Ghana

Managers of health information in the various healthcare institutions in Ghana had their specialist training in health information at the diploma level in the country. There has not been any institution in the country that trains health information managers at the bachelors and masters' levels. Most of the front desk staff at the various records departments/units have no certificate or a certificate in medical records which is purely paper records.

Some universities and other tertiary institutions run parallel programmes in health information management. For example, the University of Ghana runs a bachelors' programme in public health with some specialisation in health information during the third and final years. The Catholic University College also runs a similar programme like that of the University of Ghana. The University of Health and Allied Sciences also have similar programmes with emphasis on health information in the third and final years. Because of the structure of these programmes, they are unable to comprehensively address all the relevant courses and topics with respect to health information management.

The College of Health and Well-being, Kintampo has been at the fore-front of training diploma graduates in health information.

*Corresponding author: Emmanuel Kusi Achampong, Department of Medical Education and IT, School of Medical Sciences, College of Health and Allied Sciences, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana, Tel: 233(0)242522445; E-mail: eachampong@ucc.edu.gh

Received: October 17, 2017 Accepted: November 04, 2017 Published: November 10, 2017

The challenge has been with a post-diploma training for these graduates after working for so many years. The introduction of the health information management programme at the University of Cape Coast seeks to train these cadre of professionals to ensure professional management of health information. This is expected to ensure smooth transmission from paper records to electronic records at the various healthcare institutions.

The health information management programme (Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management) at the University of Cape Coast has been comprehensively designed to cater for all relevant topics and courses in health information. It seeks to fill the gap to train both bachelors and masters in health information management.

Some of the courses include: Information Systems for Health Information Management, Medical Terminologies, Anatomy and Physiology, Medical Records Management, Data Quality Assessment and Improvement, Quality Assessment and Improvement, Information Security and Compliance, Legal and Ethical Issues in Health Information, Project Management, Electronic Health Records, Principles of Health Information Management, Principles of Management, Medical Statistics, Data Warehousing and Mining, Programming and Software Development, Database Structures and Management, Principles of Healthcare Financing, System Analysis and Design, Web Technology, Geographic Information Systems and Research Methods.

The health information management programme at University of Cape Coast

The Department of Health Information Management trains health information management professionals at the bachelor's degree level as well as other certificate programmes in specific health information topics like data quality issues, health information technology, knowledge management, etc. The programme is a four (4) year comprehensive health information management programme which was developed by considering the local context with international focus with respect to managing health information. The content of the curriculum has gone through assessment by all the statutory regulatory bodies in Ghana (Allied Health Professions Council and National Accreditation Board). The curriculum is in line with local requirements, international standards, Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) and International Medical Informatics Association requirements.

The teaching methodologies employed for this programme is the problem-based learning (PBL), didactic and hands-on approaches.

Discussion and Conclusion

The need for health information management education is essential to ensure proper management of health information in the various healthcare institutions. With the current e-health strategy of the Ghana Health Service, there is the need for people to be trained to manage health records as well as health information in general. Since access to information is critical for proper decision making, it is imperative to have employees duly trained to manage health information.

The curriculum of the health information management programme was benchmarked with other international health information management programmes at various universities [4]. Research in health information in Ghana is very minimal. The

department seeks to make research a core part of its responsibility to ensure that quality and reliable health information is provided at the point of care to guarantee quality service to clients/patients and also enhance decision making.

Graduates of the health information management programme are expected to be well-prepared and well-equipped health information managers who will be in charge of health information or records departments within the various health institutions in Ghana and beyond. This we believe will improve the quality of data available for decision making on both clients/patients and the institutions concerned.

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Author Affiliations

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Department of Medical Education and IT, School of Medical Sciences, College of Health and Allied Sciences, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

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