

Integrating traditional medicine with western medicine

[Health & Medicine](#)



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Traditional and Bio-Medical Practice: Integrating traditional and modern systems in the Nigerian healthcare delivery. Research Question: To what extent, if any, has traditional medicine in comparison to Bio-Medical practice, been incorporated to the health care delivery systems in Nigeria and how much promotion is given to the significance and efficacy of the practice of traditional medicine in curing same illness? Abstract:

The practice of traditional medicine among the people of Nigeria in the Western region of Africa transcends the advent of Bio-Medicine and occupies a prominent position in the delivery of health care. Majority of the rural dwellers as well as substantial proportion of the urban dwellers rely on traditional medicine for solutions to illness and healing. A significant number of Nigerians living abroad rely strongly on the efficacy of traditional herbs for medical treatment, regardless of their level of education and cost of transporting such herbal medicine to their country of residence.

However, several successive governments in Nigeria have continued to neglect the indigenous health care methods in their health policy. This paper examines the relevance of traditional medicine and its contributions to health care delivery systems in Nigeria, and the rate at which people opt for alternative medical interventions as brought about by the inaccessibility of modern medicine as well as the financial implications. Against these backdrops, this paper proposes considerable recognition for traditional medical practice and its possible integration into the nation's health care delivery system. Medical system in Nigeria: An examination

Whereas health is the most precious of all things and it is the foundation of all happiness, traditional medicine, in response to the health needs of the people, developed as an integral part of the various communities in Nigeria and its practice dates back in time, long before the advent of modern technology and inventions. It in fact, plays a huge role in providing a sense of identity and spirituality to the people of Nigeria. Historically, traditional medicine reflects the social-religious structures of the indigenous societies from which it emerges, along with the values, beliefs, behaviours and practices developed over the years.

The administration of traditional medicine is conducted by a traditional healer or elder, often regarded as native doctors, who took care of their patients using extracts of plants, animals and mineral substances as well as other methods based on the social, cultural and religious beliefs of the community. Such person is also considered to be well grounded in the prevailing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs in the community about physical, mental and social well-being and the cause of diseases and disabilities (WHO, 1976).

The medical services provided by this individual is widely acceptable among the people both in the rural and the urban areas. According to World Health Organization, traditional medicine is the totality of knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social dis-equilibrium and which rely exclusively on past experiences and observations handed down from generation to generation, whether verbally or in writing (WHO, 1976).

With this definition, it can be argued that the practice of traditional knowledge is rooted in the in-depth wisdom and versatility of the administrator not only on the causality of diseases, but also the need for a healthy community without necessarily draining the people of their finances thus making health care accessible and affordable. However, despite the importance of traditional medicine, it has incredibly suffered neglect and non-recognition by the nation's health developing and planning agencies.

More attention is continually drawn to the modern medical system with little or no concern for the accessibility of this system as well and its affordability. The sustainability of an average family in Nigeria is valued at less than 5 dollars a day. Notwithstanding the government's preposition on the establishment of a health care system that is promotive, protective, preventive, restorative and rehabilitative to every citizen of the country within the available resources so that individuals and communities are assured of productivity, social well-being and enjoyment of living (F. M. H. 1988), the system, as is currently practiced is very inadequate in comparison to the Nigerian growing population and slow-paced economic development. According to the health manpower statistics, the ratio of the registered medical doctors as against the population's need is put at 1: 1, 100 with modern medical facilities being administered in mega cities and little or none made available at the rural areas.

As a result of lack of supervision or adequate provision for the essential needs of medical practitioners, doctors often times are faced with the conscientious decision to commute to the rural areas to administer Medicare on out-of-pocket expenses, which after a while becomes impossible to carry

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on. Thus the people in the rural area are left in the care of the traditional healer, who eventually cure their diseases with less charges than the bio-medical practice thereby saving the patients some money.

The news of the efficacy of the traditional medical administration soon spreads to the urban cities and an inflow of travelers is experienced for consultation and medical attention. In certain medical cases, modern medical practitioners would refer a particular patient with illness considered incurable using modern medications to traditional healers thus further reaffirming the extent to which traditional medicine constitute important source of medical care for many people regardless of their wealth or level of education.

Unfortunately, the effect of globalization and capitalist theory has eaten deep into the Nigerian government such that the individual gains or profits of the policy makers and that of those at the corridor of power is rated high and considered most important than the health and healing of the citizens. Much ado is made on the need for the nation to catch up with modern world science and technology but the nation's economy, as it is presently, cannot readily meet the high cost of modern health care and the advanced technology.