

The Benefits of Emotional Intelligence to Healthcare in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper appraised the benefits of emotional intelligence in healthcare in Nigeria. The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in healthcare, although not identified as an integral part of the healthcare infrastructure, is in reality, interwoven into everything that is delivered as part of a service provision. Emotional Intelligence is a crucial concept to integrate within healthcare organisations across all levels of employees. The knowledge of Emotional Intelligence enables individuals to understand their emotions, emotional meanings and to reflectively regulate these emotions whilst transitioning through change initiatives and periods of significant and, sometimes, rapid transformation. Through Emotional Intelligence (EI), healthcare organisations can empower everyone, from leaders, managers and staff at all levels and within the health sector. Similarly, by understanding their ability and capacity as professionals, leaders with emotional intelligence can help their staff reach their full potential to not only perceive, access and manage their emotions, but that of others as well; be it leader, peer or subordinate. This would be deemed core strength within itself. Out of this changed culture and transformation process, will arise a new vision of professional healthcare, corporate or public sector practice; embedding EI as a core component within their mandatory compliance infrastructure. Emotionally intelligent staff means a healthier organisation which for the healthcare, can lead to better patient centred-care.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Healthcare, Benefit, Nursing, Skills

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was initially formulated by Salovey and Mayer, [1], as an ability-based construct, akin to general intelligence. They contended that individuals possessing high EI had specific skills related to assessing and controlling emotions, enabling them to regulate emotions within themselves and others, ultimately

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leading to various beneficial outcomes. This concept has garnered increasing attention from both the scientific community and the general public due to its theoretical and practical implications in daily life. The same authors defined EI as "the ability to engage in accurate reasoning about emotions and to utilize emotions and emotional knowledge to enrich thinking. [2]" This definition suggests that EI is not a one-dimensional attribute and that a multidimensional approach would be theoretically consistent.

However, in the past three decades, various conceptualizations of EI have emerged, primarily falling into three models: ability, trait, and mixed. These models have influenced the development of measurement tools. In the ability model, as formulated by Mayer and Salovey, EI is perceived as an innate intelligence comprised of multiple capacities that impact how individuals perceive and manage their emotions and the emotions of others. These emotional processing abilities include (1) recognizing, assessing, and expressing emotions, (2) using emotions to enhance thinking, (3) comprehending and analyzing emotions, and (4) thoughtfully regulating emotions. In line with this perspective, assessments are designed as performance tests. Subsequently, the trait model introduced by Petrides and Furnham [3] views EI as a trait – a stable behavioral pattern over time (in contrast to a skill that improves with practice) – linked to dispositional tendencies, personality traits, or self-efficacy beliefs. It encompasses fifteen personality dimensions grouped into four factors: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability.

The third primary model for conceptualizing EI is the mixed model, which incorporates traits, competencies, and abilities. The first branch, proposed by Bar-On, [4], characterizes EI as a set of non-cognitive abilities and competencies that influence one's ability to effectively handle environmental challenges. It comprises five key components: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and overall mood. The second branch, presented by Goleman [5], also envisions EI as a mixed model, sharing some similarities with the Bar-On model. It comprises recognizing one's own emotions, managing emotions, self-motivation, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships. These emotional and social competencies are believed to contribute to managerial performance and leadership.

Importance of Emotional Intelligence

Developing skills in emotional intelligence has numerous benefits. Prati et al describe how a leader with higher emotional intelligence directly correlates to higher team effectiveness [3]. A leader who can recognise the emotional responses of those around them, navigate how these team-members interact and communicate, and predict responses of those around them, can better motivate that team to perform. A leader with high emotional intelligence can simultaneously create an environment of empowerment and support, resulting in team members who show higher self-motivation, and a conscientious responsibility to want to achieve the best for that team. In business this can mean greater profits, high employee satisfaction and worker retention. It can create teams that innovate, perform highly, and produce high quality work. In medicine this can mean better performing teams that are providing better care for their patients. Emotional intelligence also plays a key role in dealing with conflict [6]. Being aware of your own emotions in a situation allows you to control them, identify the best approach based on the perceived needs of others and how your response interplays with their emotions, in order to proceed in a productive manner when working with others. Utilising this approach effectively can often avoid conflict. If there has been conflict, developing high emotional intelligence can allow for greater success at conflict resolution.

A study by Başoğul and Özgür demonstrated the improved outcomes between nurses when the nurse in charge allocated to mediate the conflict, scored higher on their emotional intelligence scales [7]. A study by [8] reviewed how developing emotional intelligence may benefit doctors. They reported that inclusion of an educational intervention to help improve emotional intelligence "may improve stress management skills, promote wellness and prevent burnout in resident physicians". With reported levels of burnout amongst doctors increasing, they proposed the benefits of emotional intelligence would be widespread and significant. Recognising your own emotions in response to stressful environments, in this case in a clinical setting, can allow you to develop healthier coping mechanisms and prevent impact on inter-personal relationships and patient care. The study demonstrated

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significant improvements in emotional intelligence after an educational course, evidencing that this is a skill that can be learned and improved.

A doctor with higher levels of emotional intelligence can lead to improved patient satisfaction. An observational study by Hui-Ching Weng utilised self-surveys across doctors and patients in an out-patient setting and found that doctors with higher emotional intelligence correlated to increased patient satisfaction [9]. One of the difficult tasks of any patient interaction is reaching a level of understanding with a patient that best allows you to mutually agree an appropriate management plan.

Emotional intelligence allows one to regulate their own emotions, control them in their responses, and perceive and react to others' emotions. It makes sense that this would be beneficial when it comes to doing this with a patient, as well as when acting in a team. Conflict resolution skills can also be utilised here with patients and family and allow for far greater outcomes in those with high emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, it has been considered whether emotional intelligence should be included as part of a selection process for doctors, given its numerous and recognised benefits.

Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Healthcare Transformation

Reference [10] sparks a lively debate regarding how the healthcare sector has explored Emotional Intelligence (EI) and its impact on patient-centered care. This has led to an exploration of how EI has significantly contributed to organizational change, leading to smoother transformation efforts within the healthcare sector. Reference [11] points out that research has begun to investigate the connections between EI, stress, and burnout among individuals, particularly within healthcare organizations. It may be necessary to take a broader perspective within this field and closely examine the organizational culture in which healthcare services are provided. Assessing whether an organization can operate in an emotionally intelligent manner to reduce stress and burnout among healthcare providers becomes crucial. Stress and burnout play significant roles in any type of change initiative. When organizations lack emotional intelligence, it becomes evident when they fail to grasp the impact of decisions to merge not only workforces but also the entire organizational structure. They may overlook how amalgamating individual healthcare organizations, each with its own culture, infrastructure, and workforce, into a single new healthcare organization with fresh visions, values, structures, combined workforces, and skill sets will affect individuals. Such moves are highly significant, and to prevent adverse impacts on the overall patient experience, organizations must recognize the emotional resonance and overall influence of such changes. Merging organizations of any size in any industry will elicit a range of emotions, sending distress signals from various quarters and reverberations throughout the organizational infrastructure's nervous system. Consequently, this can inadvertently lead to stress, anxiety, and depression among the merged workforce, especially among those who may struggle with change, particularly if their job roles and work locations are part of the transformation effort.

EI and Nursing Behaviour and Performance

The existing body of literature strongly indicates that Emotional Intelligence (EI) has a substantial influence on the ability of nurses to provide care. Reference [12] determined that EI could predict nurses' caring behaviors to some extent. Reference [13] concluded that a nurse's capacity to manage their own emotions was a central factor in their caring behaviors. Reference [14] discovered a noteworthy connection between EI and the clinical performance of first-year undergraduate student nurses, as well as a significant relationship between EI and academic achievement. Additionally, reference [15] identified significant correlations between nursing performance and the "perceiving" and "using" emotions sub-scales of EI measurement. Furthermore, reference [16] established a significant link between total EI scores and overall nursing performance scores, advocating for the integration of EI education into nursing curricula. A systematic review of high-quality studies involving medical students revealed a modest but positive relationship between EI scores and academic success. An integrative review of literature on EI and nursing

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performance by Bulmer Smith et al. [17] reported similar correlations. Research has revealed connections between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and various interpersonal aspects of nursing, including teamwork and leadership. In a Belgian study involving 421 healthcare professionals, including nurses, physiotherapists, and auxiliaries working in 23 nursing teams within a single hospital, it was observed that collective team EI significantly correlated with team cohesion and the quality of care provided.

Furthermore, Erkutlu and Chafra [18] found that high levels of EI in team leaders enhanced the interaction between team empowerment and team pro-activity. In essence, team leaders with higher EI were more adept at motivating and supporting their teams to achieve their best performance. On a broader scale, Vandewaa, Turnipseed, and Cain [19] demonstrated a strong link between EI and conscientiousness and civic virtue behaviors. These behaviors were exemplified by nurses who went above and beyond minimum standards in their care and actively contributed to initiatives aimed at enhancing healthcare services.

At a societal level, the role of EI was investigated in a systematic review, revealing that individuals with high EI were less likely to engage in aggressive or antisocial behaviors compared to those with lower EI levels [20-21]. In summary, there appears to be a positive correlation between EI and nursing behaviors towards patients, colleagues, and the broader healthcare environment. If EI is positively associated with desirable nursing behaviors, it can be considered as having a desired impact when selecting individuals based on their values.

CONCLUSION

Through the application of Emotional Intelligence (EI), organizations have the capacity to empower all their members, including leaders, managers, and staff across all levels and contexts. In a similar vein, when leaders comprehend their professional capabilities, they can assist their team members in realizing their full potential. This extends to not only understanding, accessing, and managing their own emotions but also those of others, whether they are superiors, peers, or subordinates. This, in itself, constitutes a fundamental strength. As a result of this shift in culture and transformation process, a fresh perspective on professional healthcare, whether in the corporate or public sector, will emerge. EI will be firmly integrated as a central element within their obligatory compliance framework. Having emotionally intelligent personnel translates to a healthier organization, particularly in the healthcare sector, where it can lead to enhanced patient-centered care.

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