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Strategic planning and healthcare services



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The health care industry is one of the most sacrosanct social and economic sectors of any nation's development agenda due to the nature of services provided. In Africa, the process of managing health care service delivery to offer solutions to her health care challenges appears not to have yielded expected outcomes. One of the

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Conversations about Africa's health care markets must begin with the understanding that the health care sector in Africa, especially the LMIC (Low-Middle-Income-Countries), is burdened by poor service delivery, lack of customer satisfaction, limited branding and marketing activities, which are all needed in a well-functioning market. In this essence, the nature of "a market" requires that there must be individuals willing to purchase a commodity or service and individuals willing to provide that commodity or service.

The nature of a health care service market can be conceptualised using four classifications: geographic scope, population characteristics, level of demand, and market potential.

Geographic scope: A market is defined by the geographic scope when the service rendered is available only for individuals who live within a certain location or can get there. For example, there are health care providers that offer advanced, cutting-edge technology and skilled practitioners, but these providers operate out of a single location and in certain countries. Geography determines accessibility.

Population characteristics: Demographics is often a determiner of health care services. Some health care providers may serve only children, women, or persons with specialised needs such as cardiology, oncology, or neurology. Hospice or elder care services provide their own specialised market.

Level of demand: Market demand has a direct impact on supply. A growing population around a city or town may increase demand for a general-care clinic. Lengthy wait times to see a specialist may encourage a health care provider to expand services to another locale. Recent developments in cancer treatment have generated a demand for previously nonexistent chemotherapy treatments, evidence that there is no market when there is no demand.

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meet the needs of available customers and contribute to the economy can create a healthcare service market by identifying service gap and put in place plans to render these services.

A fifth classification or description of health care markets is a new paradigm being discussed in marketing and sales circles: markets without walls. In a technologically driven world, the services of health providers can be received from around the globe. Patients and health service providers can share an electronically supported meeting point where services will be rendered, thereby gradually decreasing the reliance on the geographically defined markets, and increasing the availability for market control by consumer demand, preference, and ability to pay vis-à-vis health challenges unmet by providers or their competitors.

Consideration of these factors – geographic scope, population characteristics, level of demand, and market potential – and the growing potential for markets without walls should be embedded in strategic plans channelled towards building more effective consumer health care service markets in Africa.

To remain relevant, organisations must be flexible in responding to the dynamics of their business environment. Such flexibility can only be achieved through attention to strategy. Businesses and organisations can predict and meet customers' needs and outperform their competitors if they are strategic in their approach to service delivery. Strategies can be applied to both long- and short-term business goals, and they can be broken down into elemental parts according to the needs and responsibilities related to a unit's goals. Strategy allows an organisation to bridge the gap between ends and means, current and future, predicted circumstances, and the business environment's dynamics. Strategy creates access and direction to the actualisation of a goal, whether that goal is oriented toward increasing profitability, solving problems, or developing new opportunities.

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as a form of checks and balances for the organisation's actions. The importance of strategic planning in the healthcare organisation and within health care service delivery underscores the need for a strategic orientation in healthcare service delivery. When the vision and mission statements align with the strategic plan, healthcare organisations enhance their competitive advantage. A strategic plan must be flexible, able to respond to the changing dynamics of the health care environment.

An adaption of Chapter 2 of the book, Health Service Marketing Management in Africa by Dr Ogechi Adeola, a faculty at Lagos Business School and affiliate to Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics, & Isaiah Adisa, Researcher & Management Consultant, and adapted for newspaper publication by Akunna Osa-Edoh, Centre Manager, CKCRLE, Lagos Business School.

'An adaptation of Ogechi Adeola & Isaiah Adisa (2019), Strategic Planning and Healthcare Services chapter, in the edited book, Health Service Marketing Management in Africa. Routledge, Taylor & Francis. Adapted for newspaper publication by Akunna Osa-Edoh, Centre Manager, CKCRLE, Lagos Business School'



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