

# The Role of Family Physician in Bridging Preventive and Curative Services among Patients in Selected Tertiary Healthcare Facilities in South-South Nigeria

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<p><b>Abstract:</b> A family physician is uniquely positioned to connect prevention and treatment even within tertiary healthcare facilities where the focus is often on specialized, curative care. Their role is to ensure patients are not just treated for illness but also protected from future disease. In tertiary hospitals, care can become fragmented across specialists. A family physician provides continuity, coordination, and a holistic view, ensuring that prevention is integrated into every stage of care. Preventive services (treatment) involve measures taken to avoid the occurrence of disease or detect it early before symptoms become severe and curative services (treatment) refer to interventions aimed at treating and eliminating an existing disease or reducing its severity. This study aimed to assess the role of family physician in bridging preventive and curative services among patients in selected tertiary healthcare facilities in South-South Nigeria. This was a cross-sectional study involving 250 women. Participants' age is between 15 to 40 years and above. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to participants. The study lasted for a period of 3 months. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 25.0 and <math>p &lt; 0.05</math> was significant. The study revealed that 60% were female, 64% were married, 44% had tertiary level of education, 48% are civil servants, 40% visit the hospital occasionally, 40% agreed that the main reason they visited the hospital was for treatment of illness (curative services) and 48% said for preventive services, 80% agreed that they been attended to, by Family Physicians, 72% are aware of preventive healthcare services offered by Family Physicians, 80% believe preventive care may reduce the need for treatment, 76% agreed that Family Physicians explain ways to prevent diseases to them, 76% agreed that Family Physicians provide both treatment and preventive advice during consultations, 84% said Family Physician encourage regular health check-ups, 80% agreed that Family Physician follow up their health condition, 76% said Family Physician coordinate their care between different specialists, 80% agreed that preventive services are integrated into their treatment plans, 80% receive health education during treatment visits, 76% agreed that there is continuity (bridge) of care between preventive and curative services and 80% agreed that Family Physicians help detect health problems early. 80% agreed that Family Physicians effectively link preventive and curative care. The study revealed that Family Physicians bridge builders between preventive and curative services.</p>	<p><b>Research Paper</b></p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b>  <i>Gbaranor K. B</i>        Department of Human Physiology, College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria</p> <p><b>How to cite this paper:</b>        Gbaranor K. B <i>et al</i> (2026). The Role of Family Physician in Bridging Preventive and Curative Services among Patients in Selected Tertiary Healthcare Facilities in South-South Nigeria. <i>Middle East Res J. Case Rep</i>, 6(2): 9-14.</p> <p><b>Article History:</b>          Submit: 25.03.2026            Accepted: 28.04.2026            Published: 10.06.2026  </p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Role, Family physician, Bridging, Preventive, Curative, Services.</p> <p><b>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s):</b> This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p>	

## INTRODUCTION

Family medicine is an important specialty that provides continuous, coordinated, and comprehensive

care for patients, within his or her family and the community in a holistic manner and this encompasses all ages, gender, race and every disease (Gbaranor, *et al.*, 2026). Family medicine also provides comprehensive

care of unselected patients with undifferentiated problems. It integrates clinical and biopsychosocial science in managing patient illness (Gbaranor, *et al.*, 2026). It is a specialty that provides complete physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual and occupational well-being of individuals within the family and the community (Gbaranor, *et al.*, 2026). Study by (Gbaranor, *et al.*, shows that majority (80%) of the participants agreed that Family medicine provides comprehensive and continuous patient care. This means that family physicians take care of people of all ages, genders, and health conditions, and they do so over long periods of time, often across a patient's entire life (Gbaranor, *et al.*, 2026). Previous study revealed that, 78% of the participants agreed that Family medicine plays a major role in Nigerian healthcare system because it serves as the foundation of primary health care and is often the first point of contact for individuals, families, and communities (Gbaranor, *et al.*, 2026). They also provide community-oriented care by considering social, cultural, and economic factors affecting health, which is especially important in Nigeria's diverse population. As such, Family physicians have opportunities to work in diverse healthcare settings because their broad training equips them to manage a wide range of health conditions across all age groups and levels of care (Gbaranor, *et al.*, 2026). Healthcare systems globally have historically emphasized curative services, often at the expense of preventive care, resulting in increased burden of avoidable diseases and healthcare costs (Babatunde *et al.*, 2021). In response, the integration of preventive and curative services has become a central goal of modern health systems. Family physicians, as primary care providers, play a pivotal role in achieving this integration due to their holistic, continuous, and patient-centered approach to care (Gupta *et al.*, 2023). This literature review examines the role of family physicians in bridging preventive and curative services, particularly within tertiary healthcare settings. Preventive services include health promotion, disease prevention, screening, and early detection, whereas curative services focus on diagnosis and treatment of existing illnesses. Traditionally, healthcare systems have prioritized curative interventions, leading to an imbalance in service delivery (Wendimagn & Bezuidenhout, 2019). The tension between preventive and curative care is well documented, with patients often valuing curative services more due to immediate benefits, while preventive services are undervalued despite their long-term impact (De Sa, 1993). Bridging this gap requires a coordinated approach that integrates both dimensions within routine healthcare delivery. Family physicians are uniquely positioned to bridge preventive and curative services due to their comprehensive training and continuous relationship with patients. They provide first-contact care, manage a wide range of conditions, and coordinate referrals to specialists when necessary (Gupta *et al.*, 2023). One of the key mechanisms through which family physicians achieve integration is through the

continuum of care, which includes prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up. By maintaining long-term relationships with patients, family physicians can incorporate preventive interventions into routine clinical encounters, thereby linking curative care with health promotion activities (Majdzadeh, 2012). Again, the referral system managed by family physicians ensures that patients receive appropriate specialized care while maintaining continuity, which is essential for integrating preventive and curative services (Majdzadeh, 2012). Family physicians play a critical role in delivering preventive services such as immunization, screening, lifestyle counseling, and health education. Evidence shows that access to a regular family physician is associated with higher rates of preventive service utilization (Hogg *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, family physicians adopt a holistic approach, viewing every patient encounter as an opportunity for preventive intervention. For instance, routine visits can be used to screen for chronic diseases, provide counseling, and promote healthy behaviors (BMC Primary Care Study, 2025). Interprofessional collaboration further enhances preventive service delivery. Family physicians working within multidisciplinary teams can address complex health needs more effectively, improving patient outcomes and increasing the uptake of preventive services (Fowler *et al.*, 2020). In addition to preventive functions, family physicians are responsible for diagnosing and managing acute and chronic illnesses. Their ability to provide comprehensive care reduces fragmentation within the healthcare system and ensures that treatment plans are aligned with preventive strategies (Gupta *et al.*, 2023). In addition to preventive functions, family physicians are responsible for diagnosing and managing acute and chronic illnesses. Their ability to provide comprehensive care reduces fragmentation within the healthcare system and ensures that treatment plans are aligned with preventive strategies (Gupta *et al.*, 2023). Within tertiary healthcare facilities, family physicians often act as gatekeepers, coordinating patient care and ensuring appropriate use of specialized services. This role is critical in reducing unnecessary hospital admissions and improving healthcare efficiency (Majdzadeh, 2012). Although tertiary healthcare facilities are primarily focused on specialized and curative services, integrating family physicians into these settings can enhance continuity of care. Family physicians may ensure that preventive measures are incorporated into specialist care, provide follow-up care after hospital discharge and coordinate care across different levels of the health system. This integration is particularly important for managing chronic diseases, where both preventive and curative approaches are essential (Wendimagn & Bezuidenhout, 2019). Also, family physicians facilitate communication between patients and specialists, improving adherence to treatment and preventive recommendations (BMC Primary Care Study, 2025).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study involving 250 women who are within the age of 15 to 40 years and above and reside in the six (6) South-South States, in Nigeria. The study lasted for a period of 3 months. Consent was sorted from the participants before giving them the questionnaires. Questionnaires were given to the participants. Each participant had one questionnaire to fill appropriately and independently after instructions were given to them by the research Assistants. Data was obtained and analyzed using SPSS version 23 and P value < 0.05 was said to be significant.

## RESULTS

The results revealed that 60% were female, 64% were married, 44% had tertiary level of education, 48% are civil servants, 40% visit the hospital occasionally, 40% agreed that the main reason they visited the hospital was for treatment of illness (curative services) and 48%

said for preventive services, 80% agreed that they been attended to, by Family Physicians, 72% are aware of preventive healthcare services offered by Family Physicians, 80% believe preventive care may reduce the need for treatment, 76% agreed that Family Physicians explain ways to prevent diseases to them, 76% agreed that Family Physicians provide both treatment and preventive advice during consultations, 84% said Family Physician encourage regular health check-ups, 80% agreed that Family Physician follow up their health condition, 76% said Family Physician coordinate their care between different specialists, 80% agreed that preventive services are integrated into their treatment plans, 80% receive health education during treatment visits, 76% agreed that there is continuity (bridge) of care between preventive and curative services and 80% agreed that Family Physicians help detect health problems early. 80% agreed that Family Physicians effectively link preventive and curative care. See tables below.

**Table 1: Participants whose Family physicians explain ways to prevent diseases to them**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose Family physicians explain ways to prevent diseases to them	190	76.00
Participants whose Family physicians do not explain ways to prevent diseases to them	60	24.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 2: Participants whose Family physicians provide both preventive and curative advice during consultation**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose Family physicians provide both preventive and curative advice during consultation	50	76.00
Participants whose Family physicians do not provide both preventive and curative advice during consultation	200	24.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 3: Participants whose Family physician encouraged for regular health check-ups**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose Family physician encouraged for regular health check-ups	210	84.00
Participants whose Family physician encouraged for regular health check-ups	40	16.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 4: Participants whose Family physician follow up their health conditions**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose Family physician follow up their health conditions	200	80.00
Participants whose Family physician follow up their health conditions	50	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 5: Participants whose Family physicians coordinate their care between different specialists**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose Family physicians coordinate their care between different specialists	190	76.00
Participants whose Family physicians do not coordinate their care between different specialists	60	24.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 6: Participants whose preventive services are integrated into curative services**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose preventive services are integrated into curative services	200	80.00
Participants whose preventive services are integrated into curative services	50	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 7: Bridge of care between preventive and curative services**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants who agreed that there is a bridge of care between preventive and curative services	190	76.00
Participants who do not agreed that there is a bridge of care between preventive and curative services	60	24.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 8: Family physician helps detect health problems early**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants who agreed that Family physician helps detect health problems early	200	80.00
Participants who do not agreed that Family physician helps detect health problems early	50	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## DISCUSSION

A family physician is uniquely positioned to connect prevention and treatment even within tertiary healthcare facilities where the focus is often on specialized, curative care. Their role is to ensure patients are not just treated for illness but also protected from future disease. In tertiary hospitals, care can become fragmented across specialists. A family physician provides continuity, coordination, and a holistic view, ensuring that prevention is integrated into every stage of care. Preventive services (treatment) involve measures taken to avoid the occurrence of disease or detect it early before symptoms become severe and curative services (treatment) refer to interventions aimed at treating and eliminating an existing disease or reducing its severity.

The study revealed that 60% of the participants were female, 64% were married, 44% had tertiary level of education and 48% were civil servants. This is because education, civil servants and women access healthcare facilities more frequently and these factors are all essential for a strong health system. When combined, they lead to better health outcomes, reduced mortality, and overall societal development. Again, education is one of the strongest determinants of health access and utilization. When people are educated, they are more aware of available health services and when to seek care.

Again, 40% of the participants visit the hospital occasionally and 28% frequently. This may be attributed to the comprehensive and holistic care given to bridge preventive and curative services by the Family physicians.

Majority of the participants agreed that the main reason they visited the hospital was for treatment of illness (curative services) and preventive services.

Curative and preventive services are both essential parts of healthcare, and they work best when used together. Each plays a different but complementary role in improving patient health and quality of life. Curative services focus on diagnosing and treating diseases after they occur and preventive services aim to stop diseases before they start or detect them early.

Curative services help patients recover from illness or injury through medications, surgery, or therapy.

Again, preventive care reduces the number of people who need curative services and curative care supports those who still fall ill despite preventive efforts. However, a balanced healthcare system uses both to improve overall patient outcomes and reduce strain on hospitals. Also, preventive services keep people from getting sick, while curative services help them get better when they do.

Majority (80%) of the participants agreed that they have been attended to by Family Physicians, 72% are aware of preventive healthcare services offered by Family Physicians. This implies that the Family physicians are doing their work through different ways such as education, counselling and treatment. The study revealed that after the comprehensive and holistic care given by the Family physicians to the participants (patients), majority (80%) of the participants believe that preventive care may reduce the need for treatment and 76% of the participants agreed that Family physicians explain ways to prevent diseases to them.

The study shows that majority (80%) of the participants agreed that Family physicians effectively link preventive and curative care (services). Family physicians effectively link preventive and curative care by making healthcare continuous, integrated, and patient-centered. They treat illness while actively working to prevent future diseases, ensuring patients receive complete and balanced care. Also, Family physicians play a central role in connecting preventive and curative care because they see patients over time, across different health needs, and often within the context of their families and communities. This continuity allows them to integrate both approaches in a practical, patient-centered way.

Again, 76% of the participants agreed that there is continuity (bridge) of care between preventive and curative services. Bridging preventive and curative services ensures that patients not only get treated when they are sick but are also protected from future illness and this leads to healthier individuals, lower costs, and a stronger healthcare system overall. Also, bridging preventive and curative services means connecting disease prevention, early detection, and treatment into one continuous system of care. This integration is very important for patients because it improves both immediate and long-term health outcomes. Again, this implies that the Family physicians is a bridge builder between preventive and curative services (care) among patients from diverse ethnic group, religion, social status and age.

Also, the study revealed that several (80%) of the participants agreed that Family Physicians help detect health problems early. Family physicians are often the first point of contact in healthcare, which puts them in a strong position to detect health problems early, sometimes before symptoms even become serious. They do this through a mix of routine care, observation, and long-term patient relationships. Again, Family physicians help detect health problems early by combining routine screening, continuous care, patient knowledge, and early investigation of symptoms. Their ongoing relationship with patients allows them to identify issues sooner, leading to quicker treatment and better health outcomes. Also, Family physicians play a key role in early detection of health problems and in linking preventive and curative services into one continuous, effective system of care. Family physicians detect health problems early through regular screening, continuous care, and close patient relationships. At the same time, they connect preventive and curative services by ensuring that patients are not only treated when sick but also protected from future illness, leading to better overall health outcomes.

Again, the study shows that 76% said Family Physician coordinate their care between different

specialists and this is because Family physicians act as the central coordinators of a patient's care, making sure that treatment from different specialists is organized, consistent, and focused on the patient not just for a condition. Also, Family physicians coordinate care between different specialists by acting as a central link by referring appropriately, sharing information, integrating treatments, and providing continuous follow-up. This ensures that patients receive safe, organized, and comprehensive care rather than fragmented services.

Majority (80%) of the participants agreed that preventive services are integrated into their treatment plans and that gives them joy and insisted that Family physicians will always be the preferred choice each time they are coming to the health facilities. This is because Family physicians integrate preventive services into treatment plans by addressing the cause of illness, promoting healthy behaviors, adding screenings and vaccinations, and ensuring continuous follow-up. This approach helps patients not only recover but also stay healthy and avoid future diseases. Also, Family physicians don't treat illness in isolation, they deliberately build preventive services into every treatment plan, so patients recover now and reduce their risk of future disease. Here's how that integration typically works: Also, when Family physicians are diagnosing and treating certain conditions, they also look for underlying risk factors, and this ensures the plan addresses both illness and its causes.

Also, 84% of the participants said Family Physician encourage regular health check-ups and this is because regular health check-ups are medical examinations done even when a person feels healthy. They are important because they help maintain good health and prevent serious illnesses. Family physicians play an important role in encouraging patients to go for regular health check-ups, and this has several key benefits such as identifying health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, infections, or even early cancer and often before symptoms become serious. Early detection usually means easier and more effective treatment. Again, regular health check-ups are essential for maintaining good health, preventing diseases, and ensuring early treatment when health problems arise. They are an important part of a healthy lifestyle. The research revealed that 80% of the participants agreed that Family Physician follow up their health condition and follow-up care by family physicians is very important because it ensures proper recovery, controls chronic diseases, prevents complications, and improves overall health outcomes for patients. Again, follow-up visits allow the physician to check whether a patient is recovering well after illness or treatment. It helps ensure that healing is going as expected.

Also, 80% of the participants receive health education during their preventive and treatment services

visits. Health education by family physicians is important because it prevents disease, improves treatment outcomes, encourages healthy behaviour, and empowers patients to take control of their health. It is a key link between preventive and curative care. Also, health education given by family physicians is a core part of primary healthcare and it helps patients to understand their health conditions, make informed decisions, and adopt behaviours that prevent illness and improve recovery.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed that Family physicians serve as a bridge between preventive and curative services by delivering continuous, coordinated, and patient-centered care. In tertiary healthcare facilities, they ensure that treatment does not end with disease management but extends to prevention, education, and long-term health promotion. Also, the study revealed that Family physicians play a central role in integrating preventive and curative services, particularly within tertiary healthcare settings where fragmentation of care is common. Through continuous, comprehensive, and coordinated care, they bridge gaps between different levels of the health system and ensure that preventive measures are incorporated into clinical practice.

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