



Evidence Summary

Survey of the Information-Seeking Behaviour of Hospital Professionals at a Public Cancer Hospital in Greece Proves the Value of Hospital Libraries

A Review of:

Kostagiolas, P. A., Ziavrou, K., Alexias, G., & Niakas, D. (2012). Studying the information-seeking behavior of hospital professionals: The case of METAXA Cancer Hospital in Greece. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship*, 12(1), 33-45. doi: 10.1080/15323269.2012.637871

Reviewed by:

Antonio DeRosa
Assistant Reference Librarian
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center
New York, New York, United States of America
Email: Derosaa1@mskcc.org

Received: 22 Feb. 2013

Accepted: 21 Apr. 2013

© 2013 DeRosa. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons-Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike License 2.5 Canada (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, not used for commercial purposes, and, if transformed, the resulting work is redistributed under the same or similar license to this one.

Abstract

Objective – To study the information-seeking practices of hospital staff and weigh the impact of hospital libraries on effective information-seeking.

Design – Survey questionnaire.

Setting – Large public cancer hospital in Greece.

Subjects – The authors surveyed 49 physicians, 43 nursing staff members, 25 administrative staff members, 23 paramedical staff members, and 5 technical staff members, totaling 145 health professionals.

Methods – Participants were given a questionnaire comprised of five parts: general information (including gender, age, education, position, and professional experience); questions on computer and Internet accessibility; questions regarding individual information needs; questions on information-seeking obstacles; and a question regarding the satisfaction with the current degree of information availability in the hospital. The last question was ranked using a 5-point Likert scale. Each questionnaire was distributed with a cover letter explaining the anonymity and consent of the respondent. Hospital members were randomly selected using a number generator and respondents returned completed surveys to the hospital personnel office in a sealed envelope within a specified

time frame. The sampled group was representative of the overall population of the hospital.

Main Results – The authors discuss demographic data of respondents: 65.7% were women; 56.7% were over 40 years old; 29.0% were graduates of higher technological institutes; 28.3% were university graduates; 9.7% held a postgraduate degree; 8.3% had a PhD; and 1.4% had only secondary education. As for the remainder of the survey questions: 64% of respondents had access to the Internet both at home and at work, while only 8.2% had no access to the Internet at all; most respondents noted using the Internet for seeking scientific information (83.0%) and e-mail communication (65.3%); the main obstacle respondents noted experiencing when seeking information was the lack of time (3.7 score on Likert scale). A lack of information services was second to the time issue with a Likert scale score of 3.6.

Conclusion – Based on the research results, the authors affirmed the invaluable role of hospital libraries. The hospital library can help to eliminate the obstacles faced by healthcare professionals by providing support in the areas of weakness based on the survey results. This can be made possible through the hospital library's involvement in educational activities, investigation of information technologies, and development of information services to accommodate the difficulties regularly experienced by hospital staff. Researchers revealed that funding for hospital libraries in Greece is an issue preventing many new initiatives, that there is no association to represent hospital libraries in Greece, that the few libraries operating in hospitals in Greece are understaffed with no administrative control, and the majority of Greek hospitals do not have adequate library facilities. These drawbacks contribute to the information-seeking challenges experienced by Greek healthcare professionals.

Commentary

This study was conducted as a means to evaluate the importance and shortcomings of the hospital library in relation to its user base. It is important to note that the researchers did not provide details about how they developed their categories for their survey, that no standard framework was used to create and analyze the questionnaire, and that the method of distribution of the questionnaire is unclear.

Aside from the ill-transparent survey categories, questions, and framework used, the study at METAXA in Greece clearly defined the target population and percentages of respondents. Also, by supplying participants with a cover letter stating confidentiality and instructions on returning the survey (in a closed envelope) to non-study researchers, the researchers ensured that both the results and participant identities were blinded to them, though the questionnaire is not completely anonymous as submissions were coded upon receipt. The authors also chose a population representative of the hospital's total community (20% of total population of medical, nursing, and administrative/technical staff). Partnering with the personnel department on this effort was an effective way of achieving an unbiased questionnaire distribution.

The authors did not include a version of the final survey with their paper, meaning readers do not have the opportunity to ensure that the questions asked were clearly stated and able to elicit exact answers from respondents. It would be helpful to see the survey itself while reading the results of the study. The use of the Likert scale is evident and this study could be replicated by other institutions if desired (with the exception of the official questionnaire used).

The conclusions reflect the analysis of the study in that the authors comment on the information seeking challenges faced by professionals and give suggestions for librarians to eliminate these obstacles. Though these are briefly mentioned by the authors, there is no further detail about implementing certain programs into the hospital library workflow. Furthermore, some examination

into ways of delivering information services with little administrative support would be helpful.

This research shows the gaps in education and opportunities for training on efficient information seeking in the hospital. New technology allows for remote training as well as more dynamic in-person instruction. Hospital librarians should know the tools their clients prefer using and show them how to enhance their experience and get the most out of research. The lack of time reported by many hospital professionals is a sign that the library can offer information services such as performing literature searches and delivering results to clients as requested, for instance. Also, evaluating and suggesting key resources that are the most intuitive for hospital

professionals is a way of showcasing the librarian's special skills and helping the client maximize their time when conducting research.

The appraisal of this information-seeking behaviour study was conducted using the Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) Critical Appraisal Checklist from Memorial University of Newfoundland (Glynn, 2006).

References

- Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399. doi: 10.1108/07378830610692154