



Evidence Summary

Time, Cost, Information Seeking Skills and Format of Resources Present Barriers to Information Seeking by Primary Care Practitioners in a Research Environment

A review of:

Andrews James E., Kevin A. Pearce, Carol Ireson, and Margaret M. Love. "Information-Seeking Behaviors of Practitioners in a Primary Care Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN)." Journal of the Medical Library Association 93.2 (Apr. 2005): 206-12.

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Abstract

Objective – To determine the information seeking behaviors of primary care practitioners in order to inform future efforts towards the design of information services that would support quality in primary care.

Design – A cross-sectional survey.

Setting – A primary care practice based research network (PBRN) of caregivers who serve a broad population while simultaneously studying and disseminating innovations aimed at improvements in quality, efficiency and/or safety of primary health care in the United States.

Subjects – All primary care practitioners in the PBRN including family practitioners, general practitioners, nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

Methods – A questionnaire comprising twenty-six questions was distributed to 116 practitioners. Practitioners attached to academic centres (who were also members of the PBRN) were excluded in order "to achieve a sample of practices more representative of the primary care practising population" (208). Descriptive data were collected and analyzed. SPSS v11.5 was used for statistical analyses.

Main results – There was a response rate of 51% (59 of 116). Fifty-eight percent of the respondents stated that they sought information (excluding drug dosing or drug

interactions information) to support patient care several times a week. Sixty-eight per cent sought this information while the patient waited. Almost half of the respondents had access to a small medical library (48%) or a hospital library (46%), while 21% used a university medical library. Approximately 14% had no immediate access to a medical library. Almost 60% of practitioners stated that they had an e-mail account. Thirty-four percent agreed that the use of e-mail to communicate with patients enhanced medical practice, while 24% disagreed. There was frequent prescribing of Internet-based consumer health information to patients by only 16% of the practitioners, while Internet support groups were frequently recommended by 5%. The main barriers to information seeking were lack of time (76%), cost (33%), information seeking skills (25%), and format of information sources (22%). The use of EBM resources was fairly low, while there was a high preference for ready reference and interpersonal sources. When compared with print information resources, the use of online resources was moderate. A significant correlation was found between use of online sources and use of print sources, namely, that practitioners who used online sources more frequently, also sought information from print sources more frequently, with the inverse being true for those who sought information less frequently from either electronic or print sources.

Conclusion – Primary care practitioners in this rural PBRN used print and interpersonal sources more than online sources. Practitioners who are more likely to use print sources are also more likely to seek online information. Librarians working in PBRN environments will need to identify interventions that address barriers such as time, cost, and information-seeking skills.

Commentary

This study investigates the information seeking behaviour of primary care practitioners in a practice based research network (PBRN) in Kentucky, USA. The significance of this setting is that PBRNs provide not only for the provision of care to a wide range of patients, but also for the facilitation of research to advance primary care practice in terms of quality, efficiency and safety. PBRNs can also serve as a vehicle for translating advances in health information services and research into practice. The investigation of the information seeking behaviours of practitioners in the PBRN adds a unique client group to the evidence base of information needs and information seeking behaviour research.

The methodology employed was a cross-sectional survey administered to the entire eligible population. The survey was approved by an institutional review board and tested. Completion of the survey indicated informed consent. It would have been useful for the survey instrument to be included in an appendix. The unavailability of the questionnaire (despite the provision of a Web link to it in the publication) prevents analysis of its suitability for the collection of data to meet the objective of the study. Nevertheless, the survey is usually the method of choice for research studies of this nature. The response rate of 51% (59 respondents) was adequate for analysis and reporting, particularly since a comparison of responders and non-respondents revealed similarities in terms of demographics and practice types. The results clearly outline use of and barriers to the use of information resources by PBRN practitioners, and the conclusions accurately reflect the analysis. The study would have benefited from an analysis of the reasons behind the differences that give rise to practitioners' inclination to seek or not to seek information

on a frequent basis, a shortcoming that was acknowledged by the researchers (210).

This research contributes to our understanding of the information needs of primary care practitioners in practice based research networks. The significance of the article is that despite working in an environment that is more oriented to research, practitioners in this setting face similar barriers (time, cost and information seeking skills) to information use as their counterparts in non-research settings. As implied by the researchers, the findings of this study can be used to inform the

development of practice based research infrastructure (208). Possible solutions may include tailored outreach programs that seek to reduce the barriers to information seeking and use. These have been demonstrated to be effective in other settings, and may well fit the research-oriented environment of this study. The use of technology, as a means of developing tools that provide access to multiple sources via a single interface, warrants investigation. Outreach via Internet based library resources also has the potential to enhance information access services.