

Developing a model for information services based on a librarian-user partnership in medical clinics in Bucharest

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Abstract: Although in many countries the role of clinical librarian who works outside the medical library's physical space, in a clinic or hospital where in the context of evidence-based medicine supports the clinical and research activity as a trusted member of a multidisciplinary team has been acknowledged for a long time, in Romania things are quite different. Most medical librarians work in academic medical libraries where they support the educational and research approach of the medical community, providing access to the scientific information in the biomedical field, and having just a coordinating role for the branch libraries in different hospitals. But in the context of the new information and communication technologies and of the developments regarding the electronic library and collections there has been created the necessary framework for a repositioning of medical librarians and for the promotion of a new type of relationship between them and users based on a possible integration of librarians as members into the clinical and research teams. This could lead to a stronger partnership between them. Change can be used for the benefit of both sides and this paper presents in brief a model for a new type of services for the information users in Bucharest medical clinics designed starting from a study of information practices at the level of hospital libraries.

Keywords: information services, medical librarians, information users, medical clinics, Bucharest

1. Introduction

In health sciences education and research and in clinical practice a great emphasis is put nowadays on evidence-based medicine. Most evidence-based medicine projects developed in different countries and institutions are in collaboration, clinicians, researchers, and librarians, all bringing their contribution in order to improve patient care. Evidence-based medicine requires "the ability to access, summarize, and apply information from the literature to day-to-day clinical problems, this means an understanding of the structure of medical literature and the use of clinical filters in searching medical databases", all these proving according to P. W. Dalrymple the fact that the librarian must be integrated into the culture of the clinical team. (Dalrymple, 2000)

The difficult part for clinicians in making decisions is generated at present by the increased volume of healthcare knowledge, the different types and representation media in which this knowledge exists. (Abidi, 2008) Medical professionals lack also the time, and especially the training to do literature searches and access relevant databases in order to properly practice evidence-based medicine. The necessary expertise for this is held by the medical librarians and information specialists who can assist them. As members of the clinical teams, they can support in a great measure the activities that take place in a clinic because they have a series of abilities such as "the ability to ask questions, the ability to learn and interest in clinical and scientific issues, good use of information and communication technologies, collection and processing of strategic information, (...)", but it is necessary that they also have knowledge and experience concerning "medical terms, project management, searches of databases, concepts of evidence-based practice, research methods used in the medical field, (...)". (Harrison et al., 2010)

In many countries the role which medical librarians have in supporting the clinical and research activity as members of multidisciplinary teams has been acknowledged for a long time. In Romania, the situation is different. Most medical librarians work in academic medical libraries where they support the educational and research approach of the medical community, providing access to the scientific information in the biomedical field, and have just a co-ordinating role for the branch libraries in different hospitals.

2. The context of the hospital libraries and medical information services in Romania

The Romanian health system is confronted with a series of problems and many of them start from the low level of financial resources allocated to this sector and also from a deficient management of the financial, material and human resources and in this context the information for the medical practice is not among the most important points on the health public agenda.

In Romania, as I. Robu remarked, there is not yet the reflex to search information for the practice as it happens in other countries. Physicians search themselves for information, very rarely or almost never thinking that a librarian or information specialist could help them. (Robu, 2011)

In Romania there are no real hospital libraries, maybe with few exceptions. Medical information can be found in the libraries of the Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy. In most cases, the branch libraries in hospitals are just some book collections in a room from different clinics or departments, no branch having a librarian.

In Bucharest the situation is similar to that in other Romanian cities where there are institutions of higher education in the medical field. The Central Library of the "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest is the largest and the oldest medical library in Romania. Established in 1857, the library currently serves the users from the whole University, which includes the Faculty of General Medicine, the Faculty of Dental Medicine, the Faculty of Pharmacy and the Faculty of Medical Assistance and Midwives. There are more

than 10,000 active users of the library. The staff of the library consists of 37 people, 32 of whom are specialists. (Porumbeanu Madge, 2011)

Technological changes, the knowledge-based society and the more specific needs of users make necessary at the level of this library an increase of efficiency, improvement of the quality of information products and user services, the creation of adequate conditions for the implementation of new managerial processes such as the knowledge management process (Porumbeanu, 2010; Porumbeanu Madge, 2012), but also a repositioning of librarians through the information services they can offer to the medical professionals in the provision of health services.

The Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest has also 95 branch libraries that exist at the level of university departments, chairs and clinics which are spread in hospitals all over Bucharest. These libraries vary in what concerns the size of their collection: from 40,000 – 50,000 volumes down to 300 - 400 volumes.

The Central Library does the acquisition and the processing for these branch libraries which are most often administrated by a member of the medical staff in every clinic. All persons who work or study in the clinic at a certain moment, teaching staff, physicians, nurses, residents, PhD students, undergraduate students, have access to the branch library. Not all branches have access to the electronic information resources provided by the Central Library. Till 1980 there were librarians from the Central Library who worked in some clinics but in the last years there have been no financial resources for clinical librarians.

We must mention the fact that in Romania the librarian doesn't have yet a very good image among the general population – aspect showed by a recent research at the patients' level (Porumbeanu and Madge, 2009), but also among medical professionals – as shown by a 2011 research (not published yet) of the author.

However, in comparison with the main category of users of the Central Library, the students, who prefer and use in a rather small number the electronic information resources (Porumbeanu, 2009a; 2009b), the users from the clinics prove other information practices and a higher preference and usage of electronic resources (79% of the participants in the survey). Many of them would want training for using these resources because they are confronted with some difficulties. Although there were some remarks that a librarian would not have what to do in the clinical team, still the majority (54%) of respondents would want a closer collaboration with the librarians which supports our proposal for developing a partnership between librarians and the medical staff of the clinics in the hospitals where there are branch libraries.

3. Information services based on a librarian-user partnership in medical clinics in Bucharest

In the context of the new information and communication technologies and of the increasing volume of electronic information resources the presence of a librarian in the branch libraries who could assist with information services the members of the clinic in their daily practice and in their scientific and research activity becomes more necessary and the importance of its role is understood by

more and more health professionals. So there is the need and also the conditions in Bucharest teaching clinics especially that a librarian is included in the clinical team that provides health services to patients and is involved in research projects.

There could be a pilot phase initially in one of the clinics and a librarian could go and work in that branch library where he could provide information services to the whole medical team. The librarian should have good communication abilities, should be able to easily integrate in the clinical team and interact with all the members of the clinic, should have experience in searching in the databases, he should be familiar with evidence-based practice, should have initiative, and skills for offering training to the medical professionals in the information literacy area.

The librarian should be invited to participate at the annual meeting for the planning of the clinic's activity, at the daily morning report and visit, at the monthly meetings when the scientific activity of the clinic (participations in conferences, congresses, etc. with papers, publishing of scientific articles, etc.) is planned and evaluated (evaluation of the research progress for the PhD theses being undertaken in the clinic, of the documentation activity for the research projects in which the clinic participates, etc.).

The librarian's contribution could be on more levels:

- Information gathering and delivery to the members of the clinic on professional scientific events, competitions for research funding, etc.;
- Information provision which could support the members of the clinic in the health services which they provide to patients ;
- Documentation activity and its results' delivery to those involved in research for PhD theses and in research projects;
- Newsletter on the new aspects in their field which are of interest to the members of the clinic;
- Training sessions provided on a periodical basis and whenever the members of the clinic request and also depending on the new resources which the Central Library offers, on the use of the electronic information resources and on the information search and retrieval techniques. (Figure 1)

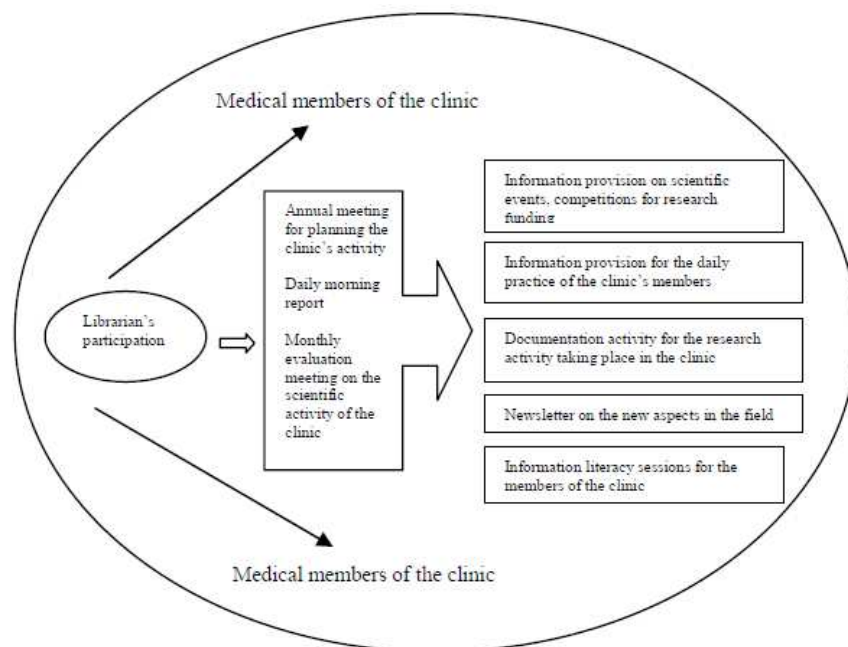


Figure 1. Medical librarian's participation in the activity of the clinical team

But provision of all these services by a librarian makes necessary his inclusion, his acceptance as a member of the clinical team, a high level of trust from the part of the medical members of the clinic in the librarian's information activity and skills, and a very good communication at the level of the whole team.

4. Conclusions

It is critical at present that librarians and information specialists provide information assistance to medical researchers and clinicians. Library and information professionals can have an essential contribution to the improvement of healthcare, to the quality of the health services by supporting medical professionals in the search and retrieval of information, by making available for them the relevant knowledge at the right time for making the best clinical decisions.

Also the value of the scientific activity, of the clinical practice and research developed by the members of the clinics from the hospitals where there are branch libraries of the Central Library of the "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest could increase on the basis of the information services offered by a medical librarian or information specialist, but an efficient activity in this sense requires a partnership relationship between medical professionals as information users and librarians.

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