Health librarians on the move: a multifaceted initiative to guide researchers out of the maze

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Abstract. In 2018 a Working Group of ISS librarians was set up with a plan to define and organize in a coordinated way all the activities to be developed in order to support affiliated researchers. All activities were mostly focused on bibliographic and bibliometric issues related to research assessment, grant applications, funding and carriers developments, which represent for researchers crucial but stressing issues, also for the dangerous proliferation of predatory publishing. The starting point, was the sharing of individual professional knowledge among the group members who were previously engaged in different sectors. A number of activities were scheduled for the benefit of our researchers and were held in the library, but also in their research laboratories. After some initial difficulties in spreading awareness of the services offered, the positive feedback received confirms the idea that becoming "librarians on the move" better fulfills practical and institutional needs of researchers.

Keywords. Information services; Research assessment; Information dissemination; Benchmarking; Publication strategies; Health libraries

1. Introduction

Librarians are not usually considered as the key players in the process of evaluating research activities, they are instead commonly regarded only as auxiliary providers of raw data extracted from pre-selected sources (Aguillo 2016).

It has also been detected that in LIS literature a high percentage of authors (around 30%) belong to scientific areas different from LIS and that they have published about 56% of the entire bulk of items in forty years (1975-2015), (Ardita 2016).

Still as a matter of fact, bibliographic and bibliometric issues management belongs to information professionals competences. *"Libraries can serve as neutral but active participants in an evaluation setting by proposing reliable*

measures, providing appropriate data, and reinforcing responsible use of metrics" (Gutzman 2018).
Epstein (Epstein 2017) also makes clear the need of expanding roles for librarians in research support.

2.   The Italian National Institute of Health - ISS

The Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità - ISS) is the main Italian research institute in the biomedical and public health field. It is the technical and scientific body of the Italian National Health Service. Its mission is to promote national and international public health trough an intense activity of research surveillance regulation, control, prevention, communication counselling and also training, for the personnel of the Italian National Health Service.

In the last few years the ISS has also been included in the Italian National Research Assessment Exercise and new Ministry of Health mandatory criteria, strictly related to bibliometric indicators, are to be fulfilled in order to apply to national grants and to access public funding. When facing this new task, very often researchers are not aware of their own bibliometric or bibliographic needs. In addition scientists are not always familiar with the different conceptual structures at the basis of the main bibliographic databases (Pubmed, Web of science Scopus) which allow the best information retrieval in their specific scientific areas. They grow frustrated when performing the activities related to the use of citational databases on which bibliometric indicators are calculated and feel all this as a waste of time. Submitting a paper always represents for researchers a crucial and stressing issue, also for the dangerous proliferation of predatory publishing**.**

3.   A changing profession: librarians on the move

The Library of the Italian ISS supports the Institute's activities since 1934, the year of ISS foundation.

As experienced librarians, we serve the needs of several hundreds of researchers in various aspects related to the publication of their studies. The services we provide range from bibliographic search and document delivery, to support in publication submission.

In all libraries, users competences and needs have significantly changed over time**.** This is more and more evident in biomedical specialized libraries. Also the Medical Library Association (MLA 2017) issued a revised set of competencies, for Health information professionals (*Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success)*, which includes both traditional and emerging roles and skills such as: open access publishing, digital preservation and organization, social media applications, and distance education.

4. Methods

In our Library since the beginning all the staff has always been in close contact with affiliated scientists and over time we had to adapt more than once our competencies to the evolving situation. During the last decade and more often in the last five years we have received a very large number of requests from our users concerning bibliometric issues i.e. personal h-index calculation with or without self-citations, journals Impact Factor for reporting, but also in order to choose the more appropriate source to submit a paper for publication. For these reasons, in particular the Research Evaluation area appears as critical and strategic, with a strong need to be developed in a more structured way in order to meet researchers satisfaction.

Bibliometrics in the ISS, from a solo librarian to a group

In the ISS library for many years only one unit of personnel had been devoted to the bibliometric task. Due to the growing number of requests of internal users and the new external mandatory criteria included in National Research Assessment, this was not anymore sufficient. It was decided to improve this service increasing the number of dedicated personnel involved in, from one to four units. The main goal was to support affiliated researchers in a field, generally considered out of their scientific competences, perceived by them as heavily time-consuming, but still strictly related to their research results and outputs.

To fulfill this task a working group, particularly dedicated to bibliographic and bibliometric internal issues, was formalized in the ISS library.
In 2018 the newly constituted Working Group made a plan to define all the topics to be developed in order to support at best affiliated researchers, as well as all the practical activities, initiatives and materials to be scheduled, in order to make them aware of all the services offered by the library group specifically devoted to Research Evaluation and Publication Support.
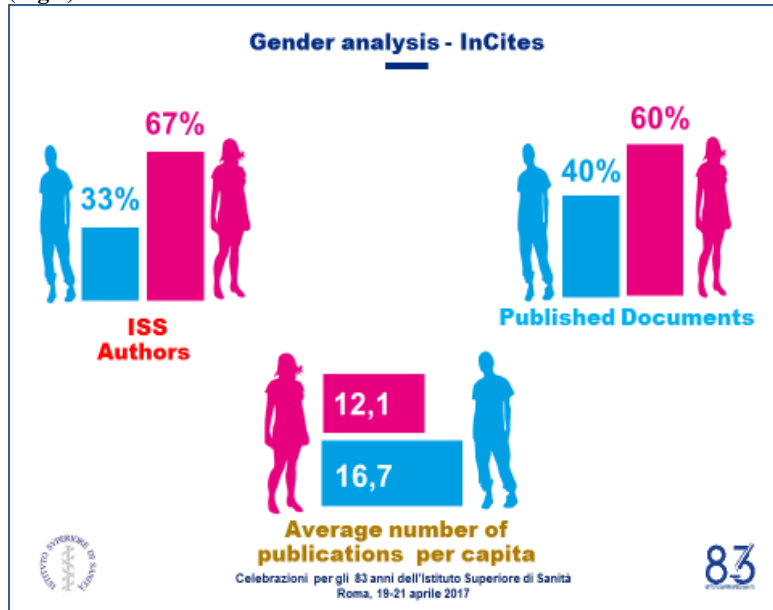
Action strategies

The starting point, was at the beginning the sharing of individual professional knowledge and expertise among the group members who were engaged previously in different sectors, as well as personal training, where possible also with certification: for example *Scopus Certification for librarian*s.
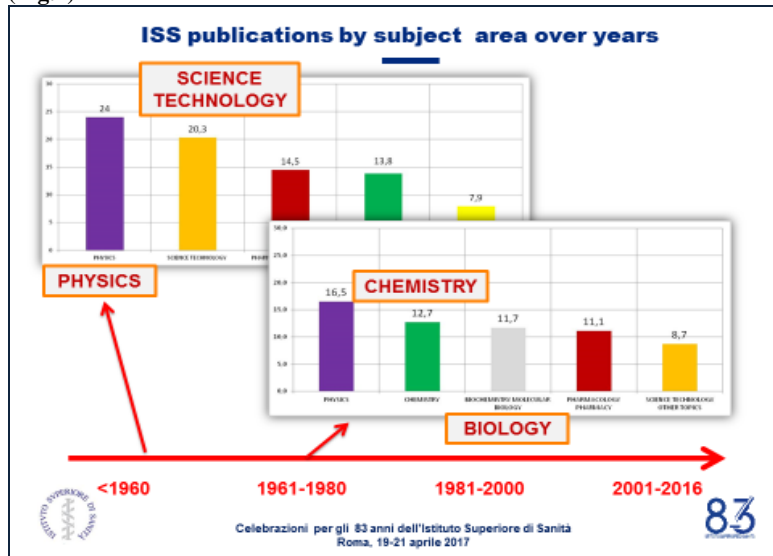
5. Users' types and trends

Our affiliated researchers' types were examined from several points of view, also by gender and publication trends over years, taking into account more deeply the last ten years. Fig.1 shows gender analysis; Fig.2 and Fig.3 subject areas of publication over years with all trends; Fig.4 contains the subject areas where our authors received highest number of citations. The data examined, were taken from a previous analysis developed and presented on the occasion

of our Institute anniversary celebration in 2017. That study was performed on Web of Science from various bibliometric perspectives. Reusing those data was particularly useful for us to better detect our users studies and targets, it also allowed us to set and schedule in a more detailed way our final objectives.
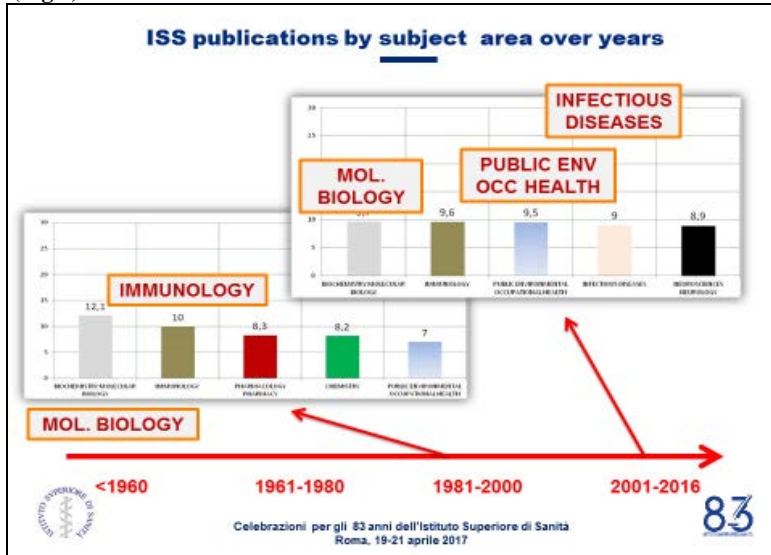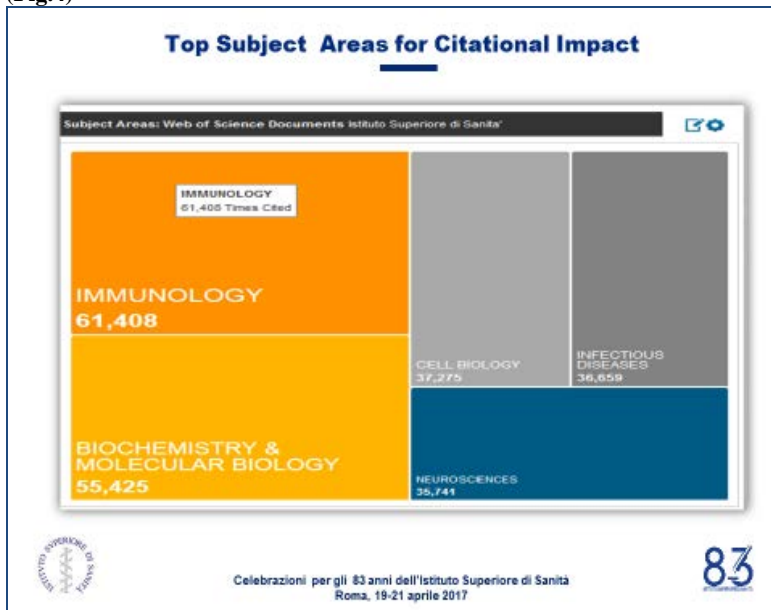
(Fig.1)

(Fig.2)

(Fig.3)

(Fig.4)

6. Types of services to be offered

The third step was to define for the benefit of our researchers a number of activities both traditional and innovative to be developed. They as matter of fact belong to two main categories: 1) Informal reference support, mostly on-demand, which includes answering to a user's brief questions in the library (face-to-face, on the phone or with emails 2) Formal products provided with a described methodology, years span and sources used, which can be presented also in official occasions, (Gutzman 2018). We decided not to follow this methodology, choosing instead to define in detail all the actions to be undertaken without any categorization, but only by type of service.

6.1. Information Retrieval

Bibliographic researches, performed on several bibliographic databases, to retrieve the best updated literature have always been a great part of health librarian tasks, but we decided to help our users to expand their bibliographic researches, generally conducted Pubmed, also consulting different multidisciplinary bibliographic platforms for citation analysis, such as Web of Science and Scopus, which not only allow a larger number items retrieval, but provide also all bibliometric indicators scores for journals, papers and authors, also in benchmarking.

6.2. Individual or collective training

We detected a number of training lessons to be held on the meaning and use of bibliometric traditional indicators and measurements, as well as on the Alternative Metrics, but also on the conceptual architecture of the different platforms for citation analysis: Web of Science, Journal Citation Reports and Scopus.
These collective courses were going to be scheduled periodically over time during the year, but also on demand, depending on individual needs.

6.3. Authors identifiers

It is well known that authors' name disambiguation is one of the most critical issues to be faced when studying authorship in general and even more important for research evaluation and in grants and public funding application, where researchers curricula and Institutes are evaluated. In the ISS Library since 2016, an administrator had taken care of creation and of maintenance of ResearcherID profiles, (more than five hundreds) on behalf of affiliated researchers, after explaining all the benefits author identifiers both for authors and institutions. Individual or collective training courses were also given, to teach them how to permanently link publication to their personal identifiers: ResearcherID, ORCID and Scopus AuthorID.
On April 2019 WOS ResearcherID space has been closed and all ResearcherID profiles have been moved on Publons: the peer-review dedicated platform, where it is now possible to have a more wide view of scientists' activities. We strongly believe that this ResearcherID migration and merging, will request to

librarians a great amount of work and time, to understand and disseminate the criteria to be followed on this Publons platform and, last but not least, of the new metrics, that may be proposed and used from now on, to evaluate a person's "*publications, citation metrics, peer reviews and journal editing work, in one place*" (Publons, 2019).

6.4. Reference and management systems (RMS) courses

Different reference and management systems (RMS) for bibliographies management, papers' writing and files of data preservation are available in our institution. In particular, Endnote and Mendeley in their online version, are freely available for our affiliated researchers. In our opinion, training on-demand on these products could be a new useful service to be offered by the ISS library.

6.5. Publication Strategies

since a long time *publish or perish* has been one of the most difficult burden afflicting scientists' work. This task is now more complicated by the urge to publish all research developed with public funds in Open Access according to PlanS principles which could become mandatory in 2020. Nevertheless Predatory Publishing is the dark side of Open Access. Even senior experienced researchers fall in predatories' traps. A recent ruling (April 2019) by the Federal Court of Justice in the United States has condemned one of the biggest predatory Academic publishers OMICS Group to pay for its fraud 50.1 million dollars in Federal Trade Commission (FTC) favor, nevertheless it is still not easy to recognize predatory publishers, journals and conferences.

For these reasons, we have planned to establish an help desk to give our authors guidance in identifying right and trusted sources, hopefully open access, where to publish.

6.6. Library services marketing

Very often researchers do not know in detail all the services provided by the library.

One of the most important tasks to be fulfilled for the working group has been to rethink advertising of all services offered, as to attract our users at most. Among the services offered we included also our availability to reach them for support in their laboratories upon request. All activities planned, were advertised as much as possible, also by spreading leaflets and training materials.

7. Results

After some initial difficulties in spreading awareness of the different coordinated services offered, a positive response and growing interest of users was noted. Our personal availability to meet researchers also in their laboratories, as to solve without delay their various issues arising at most during paper submissions, grants application and research reporting moments, was very positively received. Great satisfaction was also detected among the working group members, when we succeeded in preventing authors from

publishing on predatory journals. In addition, we noticed that as Gutzman states, the more the library proposes in bibliometric and publication support, the more its users tend to ask of it (Gutzman 2018).

8. Conclusions

The positive feedback received confirms the idea that becoming "librarians on the move", *taking knowledge where it's needed* (Shumaker 2012), being more active and proactive, better fulfills practical and institutional needs of researchers. Moreover, this experience increases awareness that Health Information Professional skills should become really flexible in compliance with all changes required at national and international level in scientific communication.

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