

The Role of Librarians in Supporting the Clinical and Research Activity from the Perspective of Doctors

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Abstract

In the context of a wider research undertaken among doctors with regard to their information practices and the use of electronic information resources, this paper analyses the possibility of any collaboration between doctors in university clinics and the medical librarians. It also explores doctors' views regarding the possible role of the medical librarians working at the Central Library of the "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy-Bucharest and their potential integration as members within the clinical and research teams.

Keywords: medical librarians, doctors, access to information, information practices, information users, university clinics, Bucharest

Introduction. Recent developments in the medical libraries and the services they provide have emphasized the need for better knowledge of users served by these institutions, of their information needs and practices so that solutions can be found on the best way to support them in carrying out their medical and research activities.

In recent years, more research were conducted in Romania at the level of medical academic libraries and their users, but they were mainly aimed at users who employ the services of central libraries (mostly students) and did not include users from university clinics equipped with branch libraries.

These branch libraries have certain collections of books, but there are no librarians to assist the users in the clinics (residents, doctors, researchers, nurses) in the information and research process. (1)

Although central libraries have qualified personnel with training in library and information science in most cases, for reasons mainly related to a lack of financial

resources, branch libraries in Romania do not have librarians, unlike those abroad where there are librarians in most hospitals and clinics (2), and it should be noted that even in the central libraries, librarians still lack a background of medical information, documentary techniques specific to this specialized field of knowledge. It should also be noted that in Romania there are no organized training, professional development courses in medical librarianship and information compared to those organized in the UK (3, 4) or in the US (5), for example, or courses for evidence based library and information practice in which the employees of these institutions could participate.

Thanks to their skills, the specialists in the medical libraries could support users in clinics, they could meet their information needs were they to work in these branches. And, in this regard, in 2012 we proposed the development of a partnership between librarians and healthcare professionals in clinics and hospitals where these branch libraries exist (1), through which librarians could be integrated in the activity of the clinic teams, where they could provide support in the medical information process. Librarians' contribution would be especially in the daily activity of medical personnel who could be provided with the necessary information, as well as with support for the research carried out in these clinics.

In this context, we conducted a research among doctors from university clinics in Bucharest equipped with branch libraries, focused on their information practices (issues not covered in this article) and on their opinion regarding the role medical librarians could play through their integration within the clinical and research teams.

As previous the research conducted among Romanian patients revealed (6), the reputation of librarians is not yet agreeable, and, given this study, we considered it would be interesting to also find out the doctors' opinion.

Setting. The research was performed in three university clinics from Bucharest benefiting from branches of the Central Library of the "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy (the Cardiology Clinic III from the Fundeni Clinical Institute, the General Surgery Clinic from the Colentina Clinical Hospital and the Infectious Diseases Adults Clinic III from the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. dr. Matei Bals"). The research was started in 2011 and data about the library and its branches were supplied by the then current library management, who approved and facilitated the conduction fo this research. Doctors from the three aforementioned university clinics took part in the research.

Objective. One of the objectives of the research (comprising the object of this article) was to assess the opinion of participating doctors regarding the role of the medical librarian, a potential collaboration with the medical librarians and a potential integration of librarians within the clinical team in the context of evidence based medicine and of various research projects conducted in clinics.

Methods. A questionnaire consisting of 28 questions was compiled, but only some of these questions are subject herein. The questionnaire was distributed to the doctors from the three clinics regardless of their position in the clinic (residents, attending physicians, consultants). The response rate was 60% lower than in the case of surveys

conducted at the Central Library and one explanation in this regard could be the lack of time for such medical information users compared to the medical students.

Results. The participants comprised of consultants (8%), attending physicians (21%) and a majority of residents (71%). (Figure 1) Some of them are also part of the teaching staff, some have a PhD in Medical Sciences, and some are PhD candidates in Medical Sciences.

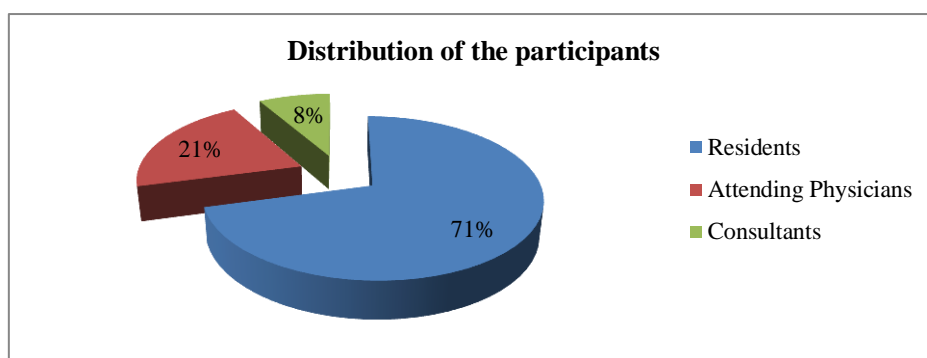


Figure 1. Participant distribution

According to the results of this study among information users from clinics, doctors use slightly different information practices compared to the main users of the Central Library – the students, especially regarding the preference and usage of electronic information resources which are much higher (79%) in the clinics.

Participants were asked if they sought the aid of the medical librarian (from the Central Library) in order to acquire the necessary information and 17% answered affirmatively, 4% said that only if absolutely necessary, and 8% provided a negative answer.

Asked about the process and methods used to identify, select, filter and assess the literature information, they mentioned medical practice guides, Cochrane Library, UpToDate, professional association guides, recommendations, Internet, NEJM. 46% of participants answered that they manage by themselves and did not require the librarian's assistance.

Asked if they would consider the medical librarians in any way as partners in their clinical, teaching, research activity, 67% of participants answered affirmatively, arguing that librarians facilitate access to information, they could be direct collaborators in the information activity. Some considered that a collaboration would be useful especially when searching for old, rare resources. 25% of participants provided a negative answer, arguing that they liked to search for the necessary documents on their own, and that librarians could only help by accessing certain databases and one respondent stated it would be difficult to imagine how useful such collaboration, such partnership could be.

Asked if they would collaborate with the medical librarians in order to acquire the information needed in their activity (Figure 2), 79% of the participants provided a positive answer, saying that they did it in order to find the news, to get quality

information, to shorten the time needed to acquire the information, to improve the scientific activity, because they might be of use due to their knowledge on the way documents are archived. 17% of the participants provided a negative answer, one of them stating that it was not necessary.

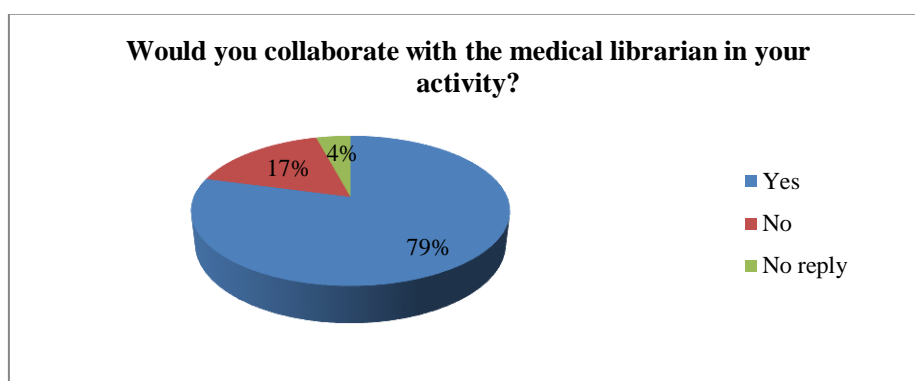


Figure 2. Potential collaboration between doctors and medical librarians

Asked how many times they asked the medical librarians for help in order to acquire the information needed in their activity, 42% of the participants answered never, 33% said 2-3 times, 8% many times and 4% one time. (Figure 3)

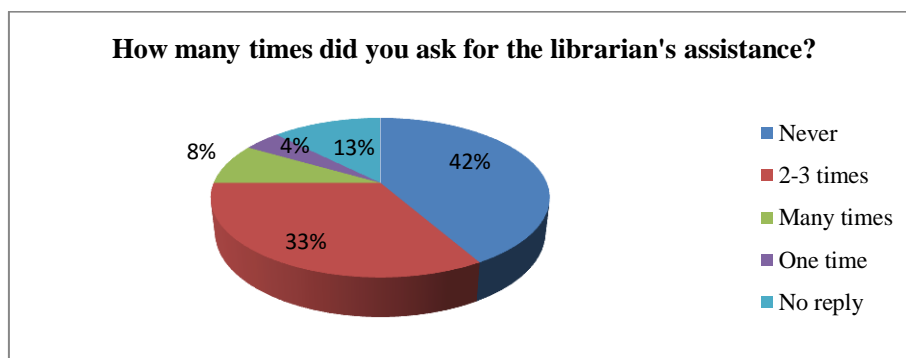


Figure 3. How many times doctors asked for the librarians' assistance

When asked if they believed the integration of a medical librarian, skilled in searching, selecting, filtering and assessing the information of specialized literature within the clinical / research team was useful, 75% of participants answered affirmatively, arguing that they would support this for a more efficient, easier access to information, for assistance in the documentation process where the librarian could offer enormous help in research, in terms of time saving, scientific activity improvement and less work, help in selecting quality information sources and facilitating the research activities. 17% of the participants provide a negative answer, a respondent stating that it would be more useful to benefit from a central library, but with an easier access, and

another participant said that everyone should stick to their job, completely rejecting such a possibility.

The results prove that most participants in this study are aware of the importance and the advantages which could stem from the presence of a medical librarian in the clinical team.

Asked about the current role of the medical librarian, which should be taken into account in the context of the great volumes of medical scientific literature, of the evidence based medicine, 71% of the participants answered by mentioning the following aspects: information selection, physician assistance in order to find the information faster, facilitating access to information, information filtering, provision of recommendations in the information search and retrieval process, a guiding role, direction assistance, a role in the selection and filtering of useful information, providing help for the selection of quality information, providing help in the documentation phase for various research projects, selecting three priority databases. One participant said that the main issue is the presence of a librarian in the clinical library.

We also wanted to find out the participants' opinion on the advantages of access to electronic information resources. 67% of the participants indicated: quick access, access to recent information, professional improvement, access to new quality information, speed, greater volume of information, up to date information, access to rare or specific cases, unlimited information, news in different fields, the latest articles / research in the field, increase easy in handling electronic resources, accessibility, a significantly larger fund of resources to select from, shortening of the documentation phase, along with the access to electronic resources the fact that they are not required to leave the OR anymore.

The participants' suggestions regarding electronic information resources and assistance provided by the library so as to better meet their information needs included: access to the electronic resources provided by the library from home or from the clinic, solutions for accessing the online medical platforms on an individual basis in order to be able to use them outside the workplace, access to as many online publications as possible, free passwords to specialized sites, a list with the most useful sites for different specialities, free access from home, training modules for accessing the electronic resources, every clinic should have access to resources like Elsevier.

Despite some opinions completely rejecting the very idea of having a librarian in the clinical team, most participants (54%) expressed their desire for a closer collaboration with the librarians.

Conclusions. The results of our study support our proposal for building a partnership between librarians and doctors in the Bucharest university clinics equipped with branch libraries.

Since the time when this survey was conducted, changes occurred with regard to the mobile access of doctors and other users of the medical libraries to electronic information resources. Through Anelis Plus (Association of the Universities, Research and Development Institutes, and Central University Libraries in Romania), a consortium for the acquisition of electronic resources (7), all users of the Central Library of the

„Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest are provided with mobile access to medical scientific databases. But actions are still needed in order to inform the users in the clinics, and in the branch libraries about this possibility.

Medical librarians should be perceived as trusted intermediaries, however, a lot of work is still required in Romania in this respect, and this project could be initiated in the clinics and hospitals where doctors and other medical professionals need their assistance in the process of information search and retrieval. Efforts and actions are necessary, both from the Central Library and also from the clinics, in order to have a trained librarian in every clinic library and integrate him / her within the clinical team. The opinions of doctors vary from those who deem it necessary to have an information professional guiding every physician according to his/her information needs, to those completely rejecting a collaboration with a librarian in their clinical and research activity.

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