

Need of Continuing Education and Soft Skill Development for Medical Librarians

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Introduction

Men continue to study to learn new material, new ideas, and new skills - new at least to them, if not to the world. It is a fact that everyone throughout his life reinforces and deepens his knowledge and attempts to learn new facts and techniques, though usually in informal, rather than formal, situations. It is a symptom of the accelerating pace in the changes in the world about us today that ever increasing numbers of our citizens are spending ever increasing portions of their post school life in education.

The mark of a learned society is that its members continue their studies during their entire careers. They do this partly to reinforce and deepen knowledge of their field which they already hold; this may be considered in the nature of a refresher, a review of half-forgotten ideas or skills.

Continuing Education opportunities may continue to take the form of traditional classroom instruction, but may also include the delivery of instruction or learning opportunities via distance education or self-study methods. They may employ technologies, including (but not limited to) the following: television and radio broadcast, satellite teleconferencing, and computer-mediated communication (computer conferencing, web, e-mail or electronic mail list technology) of various sorts.

Continuing Education course is defined as a planned learning experience with detailed learning objectives defined by the instructor(s). It can take the form of formal classroom instruction or distance education. Courses contain exercises and activities where the participants practice or are tested on what they have been learning.¹

Conroy defined continuing education as "those learning opportunities utilized by individuals in fulfilling their need to learn and grow following their preparatory education and work experiences."²

Continuing Education helps to enhance library practice, education, administration or research and to improve health care by improving health care information, access to it or utilization of it.

Need of Continuing Education for Medical Librarians

Rapid innovations in health care, information science, and communications are placing unprecedented pressure on health sciences librarians to broaden and enhance their skills and knowledge.³ Medical librarians have specific training needs which concern continuing education in various subjects in their field, subject knowledge and teaching and education skills for user education.

Qureshi's 1990 survey was one of the few to examine subject knowledge as it applies to health sciences librarianship. His study of health sciences librarians found a need for subject knowledge; some respondents indicated that their formal education had been in non-health sciences areas and that they had to acquire subject knowledge on the job to do their work.⁴

One columnist in the Washington Post called "tons of irrelevant data and distracting fluff"⁵. The powerful technology, increasing complexity in the knowledge domains, and information overload in the health professions spells opportunity and hope because we are the profession most expert at quality filtering and serving as knowledge coaches and discoverers of trusted resources in a world gone wild with a surfeit of information. Changes in technology naturally affect the needs of librarians. The proliferation of electronic indexes and other resources challenges them to learn new skills and keep up to date with a resource base that is expanding faster and faster. By the same token the technology also creates avenues for providing the needed training and disseminating that training far and wide at the click of a button.⁶

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Preferred Modes of continuing education:

Seminar / workshop
Online Courses
Teleconference
Self-study programs
Professional meetings
Providing educational material and instructions
Conferences

Some deterrents to continuing education:

Distance
High cost
Time
No training provided according to interests
Low quality of organization
No recognition of training

Continuing education facilitate the medical librarians in preparing for new responsibilities like, instruction and consultation to clinicians, administrators, and students in literature searching, providing information on new medical treatments, clinical trials and standard procedures by conducting research on various health related topics, providing clinical information services and other information to enable doctors to provide the best care to patients and being part of health care team. He needs to work with database management, using computer and other virtual infrastructure, various forms of media such as websites, digital archives, audio and video files.

Soft Skill Development For Medical Librarians

Skill is an ability or proficiency in execution or performance, which is required for a person to plan and execute an action designed to achieve some goals or accomplish a particular task. A skilled person has the ability to perform any task successfully. He can face the challenges occurs in a particular profession because of the social, economic, education and technological changes. Thus in order to cope up with the ever-changing library and information science profession, the library professional must be a skilled professional.⁷

These are new skills that current information Professionals, as well as those entering the field, will need to acquire.

1. Technological skills mean those skills which are required to handle information technology and its other related fields.
 - Computer and Information Technological Tools using Skill.

- Skill of using Internet and Computer Communication Networks.
 - Information Retrieval Skill.
 - Designing web tutorials to climbing the career ladder.
 - Selection and Managing of electronic resources.
 - Designing instructional websites.
2. Traditional basic skills.
 3. Basic managerial skills.
 4. Communication skills, like Fax, E-Mail, Bulletin Board, Web Sites, Blogs etc.
 5. Preservation Skill for traditional library as well as e-resources.
 6. Information literacy in the medical field to recognize when information is needed and having the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information'.

Medical librarian skills in understanding the medical terms, medical literature and how it applies to individual patient care, helps in improving the abilities to communicate with physicians and patients, to read and understand the medical literature, and to relate clinical concepts in constructing a literature search.

Discussion

Part of the information overload that is apparent today in the health professions is not solely the information explosion, but it is the wealth of dross and the need to filter and sift through mountains of information to find the pearls of information and knowledge that our users seek—to make sound clinical, business, scientific, and personal health care decisions. As medical librarians, we know the path to knowledge and wisdom is not always a quick Google search, although the powerful search engine will definitely help in the journey to the truth.

To provide filtered information, there is a need to give particular attention to librarians training in medical terminology who don't have subject knowledge in health sciences field.⁸

Department of Library and Information Science of different universities and Institutions, some other organizations have also been working for the skill enhancement of library professionals in India. INFLIBNET organizes SOUL, PLANNER and ILMS training programme. Indian Association for Special Libraries and Information Centers (IASLIC) is also working for improving the technical efficiency of the library and information professionals. NISCAIR organizes different IT related short-term courses.

NISSAT encourages and supports variety of skill development programmes for the library and information professionals on CDS/ISIS, WINISIS, TQM, Internet and web design etc. DESIDOC and NASSDOC arrange different short-term training programmes.

In India there are 335 recognised medical colleges, in which libraries about 1350 professionals and 1350 semiprofessional are working. Medical Library Association (MLA), Chicago at International level, National Institute of Family Health and Welfare, New Dehi and Medical Library Association of India (MLAI) national level, some states level associations are also organising continuing education programmes on medical librarianship.

Conclusion

Continuing Education is a professional development strategy that enables fledgling professionals to take advantage of the skills and expertise of the senior members for professional growth.

Most of the studies conclude that librarianship schools education does not provide adequate knowledge on health sciences terminology in order librarians to exercise their duties in health sciences libraries. The knowledge of subject terminology and classification acquired by studies or by professional experience in a corresponding library leads to improve librarian's skills in database searching and increases user's confidence to librarian. However, Library schools curricula give limited opportunities for education in subject knowledge in basic health sciences fields⁹. Hence the education of librarians has been possible only at the practitioner's level.

Continuing education is especially important to the medical librarians in preparing for responsibilities, in implementing new technologies, to deal with the change. Librarian-mediated services linking knowledge and critical decision making in health care have become more valuable than ever as technology continues to reshape an increasingly complex knowledge environment. Although continuing education has not been widely reported in medical librarianship.

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