

Training needs of the health sciences librarians in Greece

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the training needs of the Greek health sciences librarians. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 48 questionnaires and individual semi-structured interviews with three librarians. The results indicated the need for continuing education of the health sciences librarians. Most of librarians have not attended any training course in medical librarianship and have not subject knowledge in health sciences field. Respondents indicated that the preferred subjects for their training were “databases and medical sources on the Internet” and “methodology of medical information retrieval”. More than 80% regarded that the updating knowledge and skills was the most important motivation for participation in a training course. The Greek health sciences librarians need further training in health sciences databases, medical information sources, teaching methodology and subject knowledge in health sciences field. They want to be trained mainly by open and distance learning. However, the lack of providing any continuing education from the professional organizations reduces the possibilities for their training.

Key words: Education, Continuing, Librarians, Libraries, Medical, Greece

INTRODUCTION

The literature on the training of health sciences librarians investigates their preferred subjects for training, modes / methods of continuing education and motivations

and deterrents of training. Previous studies ^{1,2} indicate that health sciences librarians prefer short (one day) courses in subjects related to automated systems, planning and marketing. Recent studies ^{3,4,5} report the need for subject knowledge. Most 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 users confidence to librarian. However, Library schools curricula give limited opportunities for education in subject knowledge in basic health sciences fields. According to research findings, library schools need to include in their curricula: teaching skills, advanced information retrieval skills and methods, project management skills with more practical exercises. Particular attention should be given to librarians training in medical terminology who don't have subject knowledge in health sciences field.⁴.

AIM

The aim of this empirical survey was to investigate the training needs of health sciences librarians in Greece.

The study investigates the following:

1. Do the librarians of Greek health sciences libraries have any specific training needs and which are them?
2. Have librarians been trained? Are they willing to be educated? What are the various methods of continuing education, the motivations and deterrents of training?
3. What are the librarians opinions about their ability to train library users ?

METHODS

The survey was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, quantitative data was collected from the entire population of Greek health sciences librarians ⁶. Specifically: the hospital libraries (general, special and university hospitals), academic health sciences libraries (medical, veterinary, dentistry, pharmacy school, etc.), research centers and institutes libraries (Biomedical Research Foundation Academy of Athens, Institute Pasteur, Centre for Mental Health, etc.).

The survey was conducted during the period February to March 2009. The same questionnaire was sent individually to 62 librarians who are employed in 37 biomedical libraries. Forty-eight (77,42%) questionnaires were returned.

The second phase consisted of three personal semi-structured interviews. Our sample was a purpose sample of three typical cases: a hospital librarian working in a hospital with fewer than 400 beds capacity and an average work experience, a research librarian with little work experience and an academic librarian with extensive professional experience⁷.

Data from questionnaire surveys were used to create questions asked during the three librarian interviews. The interviews were conducted in late April. The method of content analysis was used to extract interviews data. ⁸.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed for the quantitative survey consisting of twenty-five (25) closed and open questions. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on 1) library features, 2) demographic characteristics of health sciences librarians, 3) methods of continuing education, 4) subjects for training 5) motivations and deterrents.

Semi-structured interview

The interviews were planned based on 9 key questions. Interviews questions explored the views of librarians on the influence of subject knowledge in their work, and the need for enhancement of their educational role.

RESULTS

This study concerns 48 health sciences librarians working in 37 biomedical libraries in Greece. The survey revealed that more than 70% librarians in Greece work in hospital libraries, and most of them (64%) work in large hospitals with more than 400 beds, 18,75% in academic libraries and 10.42% in biomedical research centers and institutes. The majority of librarians are married women with at least one child, have a degree in library and information studies by Technological Educational Institute of Greece (TEI) and they work in hospital libraries (*Table 1*).

Table 1: Allocation of health sciences librarian by gender, degree and type of library

	Woman			Man		
	Hospital Library	Academic Library	Research Library	Hospital Library	Academic Library	Research Library
Phd	1					
Msc	4		1	1		
University degree			1			
Technological degree	24	5	1	1	3	2
No degree	1					
Other	2	1				
TOTAL	32	6	3	2	3	2

They have professional experience over 11 years in health sciences library but they have not a degree in health sciences field. However, 72% of respondents believe that a degree in health science would give them more confidence in terminology and general subject knowledge, particularly at the beginning of their careers. On the other hand, after few years, the professional experience counterbalances the lack of subject knowledge. Similar findings gave the qualitative data by content analysis of interviews.

Librarians reported that the library schools did not give them the specific qualifications to work as health sciences librarians but gave them general knowledge and information tools to work.

Continuing Education

More than 90% of the respondents have not attended any training course in medical librarianship whilst more than 85% indicated a desire for training (*Table 2*).

Table 2: Modes of continuing education preferred by librarians

	HIGH PREFERENCE		AVERAGE PREFERENCE		LOW PREFERENCE	
Seminar (workshop)	42	87.50%	2	4.17%	0	0.00%
Online Courses	26	54.17%	15	31.25%	5	10.42%
Teleconference	9	18.75%	13	27.08%	18	37.50%
Self-study programs	6	12.50%	12	25.00%	23	47.92%
Professional meetings	26	54.17%	11	22.92%	6	12.50%
Providing educational material and instructions	16	33.33%	12	25.00%	15	31.25%
Conferences	27	56.25%	9	18.75%	9	18.75%

Regarding to various modes of training, 60% of librarians prefer the "long-term" courses using open and distance learning, while 87.50% of them indicates a high preference for seminars/workshop.

The self-study received low preference ranking from 47.92% of respondents. However, almost half of the respondents indicate that spend for training activities 1-5 hours a week.

Librarians (60%) indicated that they do not read journals of medical librarianship. Moreover, only one third of the respondents who read indicated the particular journal name. Sixty per cent of respondents replied that they used to visit health sciences websites weekly, giving high priority to PubMed (*Table 3*).

Table 3: Activities for knowledge acquisition

	No useful	Less Useful	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful
Reading e-newsletters	0.00%	10.42%	22.92%	43,75%	20.83%
Reading journals or newspapers	2.08%	4.17%	22.92%	58.33%	10.42%
Participation in professional organizations	0.00%	14.58%	27.08%	45.83%	10.42%
Visits to scientific websites	0.00%	0.00%	10.42%	60.42%	27.08%
Training courses / seminars	0.00%	0.00%	2.08%	45.83%	50.00%
Self- study	2.08%	6.25%	37.50%	33.33%	18.75%

Table 4: Subjects preferred by health sciences librarians for continuing education

	HIGH PREFERENCE (score 1-3)	AVERAGE PREFERENCE (score 4-6)	LOW Preference (score 7-11)
Administration	33.33%	18,75%	33.33%
Marketing	20.83%	20.83%	39.58%
Health care economics	12.50%	8.33%	60.42%
Databases and medical sources on the Internet (Pubmed, Medline, CINAHL, INTUTE, Mednet, Medical Matrix ...)	77.08%	12.50%	4.17%
Cataloguing	22.92%	25.00%	35.42%
Collection Development	27.08%	33.33%	18.75%
Education methodology	35.42%	37.50%	14.58%
Medical information retrieval(search techniques and tools on the Internet, full text books and journals)	72.92%	8.33%	10.42%
Subject knowledge in health sciences (terminology, classification, searching)	43,75%	31.25%	18.75%
Library with one librarian	12.50%	18.75%	41,67%

Related to preferred subjects of continuing education, respondents considered Databases and medical sources on the Internet (Pubmed, Medline, CINAHL, INTUTE, Mednet, Medical Matrix) as a high preference issue for additional training (*Table 4*).

Motivations and Deterrents

Regarding to the factors that might encourage or discourage participation in a training medical librarianship course, respondents were asked to mark their motivations and deterrents (Table 5-6). Updating knowledge and skills were by far the most important motivation (81.25%). The high cost (52.08%) and the distance (27.08%)on a scale 1-7 were the strongest deterrents.

Table 5: Motivations for continuing education

	1	2	3	4	5
Updating knowledge/ skills	81.25%	8.33%	2.08%	0.00%	2.08%
Personal satisfaction	8.33%	50.00%	18.75%	14.58%	4.17%
Certification requirements	4,17%	8.33%	43.75%	37.50%	4.17%
Professional recognition	6.25%	31.25%	20.83%	29.17%	6.25%

Table 6: Deterrents to continuing education

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Distance	27.08%	27.08%	8.33%	14.58%	12.50%	0.00%	2.08%
High cost	52.08%	20.83%	20.83%	0.00%	2.08%	0.00%	0.00%
Time	10.42%	12.50%	20.83%	22.92%	8.33%	8.33%	4.17%
No training provided according to my interests	22.92%	14.58%	14.58%	18.75%	10.42%	4.17%	2.08%
Low quality of organization (training halls, program, trainers..)	10.42%	12.50%	12.50%	16.67%	27.08%	4.17%	0.00%
No recognition of training	4.17%	6.25%	8.33%	6,5%	8.33%	41.67%	10.42%

DISCUSSION

The need for specific subject knowledge and lifelong learning of health sciences librarians concludes as a finding of this study following other earlier studies concerning subject knowledge of librarians ^{1,2,4,5,9}.

Especially in Greece, training programs for medical librarianship are not provided as there is not any relevant body for example an Association of Greek medical librarians.

The survey favored open and distance education method of continuing education as physical presence is not required. It also facilitates mothers and working librarians. The seminars are rather preferred because they are the most common mode of training. The type of library and the size of institution does not seem to have an effect on the librarians preferences.

Half of the respondents reported that they spend 1-5 hours per week for continuing education activities through various means. In another study respondents reported that they spend an average 6 hours per week for training activities⁵.

Librarians consider that reading journals or newspapers was a helpful activity. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents reported that it was very useful and extremely useful. However, although they indicate the usefulness of current information by journals, they do not seem to be informed by them, either because of the lack of a greek medical librarianship journal, or because of the cost of a foreign journal subscription. Another study indicated that 55% of respondents replied positively when they were asked if they are informed on current issues of medical librarianship, while 60% could not name any medical librarianship journal⁹. An important role in training motivation seems to play the improvement of knowledge and skills².

CONCLUSIONS

According to the survey, Greek health sciences 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. The acquiring subject knowledge in

health sciences field is indicated as a training need provided either by specific training programs or by professional experience.

The Greek health sciences librarians indicated that they prefer the open and distance education training, online lessons and workshops. The most important reason for their training is updating knowledge and skills, while the high cost of training is the main deterrent. Even though librarians consider necessary the continuing education, they have not attended training courses in their field because they are not provided by any professional organization.

The Greek health sciences librarians are educating their users and have indicated that they require more training in teaching techniques and learning theories, in order to establish a framework of effective training¹⁰.

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