

Librarians' Role in Building Information Literacy Skills of Health Professionals for Evidence-Based Practice

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ABSTRACT

The paper looks at evidence-based practice (EBP) and the role of librarians in training health professionals on information literacy skills to fully utilize Evidence-Based information resources to improve health practices and patient care management systems.

The paper spelled out the various roles librarians played in inculcating knowledge of Evidence-Based information resources into health professionals. It concluded with the suggestion that librarians be included in the process of the development of information literacy skills of health professionals for the optimization of information resources toward the sustenance of resilience EBP.

Keywords: Evidence-based practice, Information literacy skills, Health practitioners, Librarians.

BACKGROUND

Health practices have gone beyond use of only clinical expertise to include use of documented evidence with consultation with patients to arrive at appropriate and effective care to warrant the coinage or origination of the concept of Evidence-based Medicine (EBM). According to Webster's New World Medical Dictionary (2008), evidence-based medicine is the judicious use of the best current available scientific research in making decisions about the care of patients. Evidence-based medicine (EBM) integrates clinical

expertise with research evidence and patient values p. 163. EBM allows clinical prediction rules to be arrived at following standard procedures, which then shows that the concept extends beyond mere searching and use of literature to filtering and critical appraisal of the evidence (resources) before use. Sullivan and Wyatt (2005) aver that clinical prediction rules are designed and made available to increase the accuracy of clinicians' diagnostic and prognostic assessments with the use of EBM resources. EBM resources provide a host of research guidelines, templates and critical pathways to evolving medical practice and provide organised health information in a universe of complex resources. Grimes (1999) asserted that EBM offers a powerful tool for better patient care and learning. It also involves the progression from clinical data to information and knowledge, to bring about changes and improved medical outcomes. With the increasing relevance and use of library resources in both print and electronic formats for evidence-based practice (EBP), there is the need for health practitioners to obtain and develop the necessary information literacy (IL) skills to access requisite resources to improve health services.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) integrates individual clinical expertise into the best available clinical evidence obtained through systematic research (Hong and Chen, 2019); and to perform systematic search/research,

there is need for information literacy skills (ILS). Looking at the importance of ILS, Gathoni (2008) stated that there is a need for medicine to be based on medical evidence rather than clinical evidence to avoid bias and poor results.

The American Library Association (ALA) (1989), as quoted by Ekong and Ekong (2018), described information literacy (IL) as the knowledge of one's own information needs and the ability to access, evaluate, process, and use retrieved information strategically. Also, information literacy skills are seen as the ability of an individual to access, evaluate, organise, and use information from various sources (Uzuegbu, 2014). Information literacy skills constitute one of the critical skills needed to navigate the quantum of health resources available in electronic and print formats. ILS entails the

ability to know the required information and how to access it, knowing the legal and ethical aspects of the resources and using them to achieve the set task(s). Therefore, information literacy skills are crucial to effective patient management and care to establish the scientific basis of clinical care. This implies that information literate persons do not just retrieve and use information. Rather, they evaluate the retrieved information to identify what is relevant from the mass of information retrieved before use. Brennan et al. (2020) described the information literacy competencies as crucial to health professionals for evidence-based practice. The ILS required by health professionals is contained in Entrustable Professional Activities (EPA)

Framework (figure 1)

Framework	EPA 7 (Evidence-Based Medicine) functions
1	Develop a well-informed, focussed, pertinent clinical question based on clinical scenarios or real-time patient care
2	Demonstrate basic awareness and early skills in the appraisal of both the sources and content of medical information using accepted criteria
3	Identify and demonstrate the use of information technology to access accurate and reliable online medical information
4	Demonstrate basic awareness and early skills in assessing applicability/generalisation of evidence and published studies to specific patients
5	Demonstrate curiosity, objectivity, and the use of scientific reasoning in the acquisition of knowledge and application to patient care
6	Apply the primary findings of one's information search to an individual patient or panel of patients
7	Communicate one's findings to the healthcare team (including the patient/family)
8	Close the loop through reflection on the process and the outcome for the patient

Source: Brennan, E.A., Ogawa, R. S., Thormodson, K. and Isenburg, M. (2020).

So, information literacy skills involve navigation skills, selection and evaluation skills, and the capability to use information effectively at the point of care. These skills allow health practitioners to handle the contents of information resources and know where and how to look for the resources. Therefore, information literacy presupposes that an information user knows when information is needed, accesses, evaluates, uses and disseminates information, especially in an electronic environment, to unravel particular problems for research purposes. There is a serious call for increased literacy among health workers with increased health information resources

in the current era. Information literacy defines the ability to identify, find, evaluate, and use information effectively; with these, the health professionals will learn how to assess websites' quality, credibility, and validity from successful search methods to evaluation techniques, give proper credit and communicate ethically.

Librarians' Roles

To inculcate these skills in the health professional, librarians are key players as the custodians of information. Librarians are essential as they are professionally trained and have knowledge and skills in information handling, access, and

management of information resources which are the critical variables in the EBP of health practitioners. Librarians in the health sector have knowledge of health information resources. They acquire, organise, give access and disseminate information resources; they also serve as essential factors to the successful implementation and practice of EBM, especially as they teach information literacy skills and application amidst numerous information resources. Their role includes:

- teach about finding and evaluating information from various sources, i.e. various EBM resources and how to search them
- Librarians teach health professionals how to frame search questions or terms to arrive at the appropriate evidence-based resources. The librarian assists the health professionals in how to formulate queries using PICO and other approved terms. This is the fundamental key to successful evidence-based practice.
- Teaches search strategies. The librarian guides the key search strategies using keywords, truncation, Boolean operators or field codes to aid health professionals EBP mostly in accessing electronic resources.
- Librarians teach how to appraise literature from various sources and bring out the most appropriate evidence for the clinical decision. In appraising documented evidence, the librarian teaches the health professionals how to identify the authenticity of the resources, the authority, the accuracy and the reliability of any source of information.
- Librarians teach how to ascertain the usability of the evidence. This has to do with the applicability and adaptation of the evidence to patient care.
- The research process and how to communicate findings in a reputable outlet to contribute to the Scopus of knowledge
- Teaches the legal and economic implications of using EB resources.

CONCLUSION

Adequate information literacy skills help health professionals practice EBM, in lieu of appropriate health care delivery system. The article has pointed out librarians' crucial roles in promoting evidence-based practise among health professionals as the EBM resources essentially promote good health and improve patient care management. To this end, health science librarians should be involved in the training and retraining of health professionals. Librarians as polymaths coupled with their expertise and versatility in information environment, are in vantage position to oil the wheel of effective sustenance of EBP for optimal benefits.

Declaration by Authors

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