

Medical Education

Medical Library Cooperation: a necessity

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Received: June 20, 2006 Accepted: August 27, 2006

ABSTRACT

No one library is able to make available every thing a client might need on a particular topic. To deal with this common problem, the libraries of similar type are cooperating among each other to share their resources. In Pakistan, to maintain adequate services for their users, the cooperation among medical libraries is the necessity of the hour. (Rawal Med J 2007;32:73-75)

Key Words: Library cooperation, inter library loan, resource sharing, medical information, medical education,

INTRODUCTION

Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan (1892-1972) was considered the father of library science in India. His five laws are a classic of library science literature.¹ and these are accepted as guideline for ideal library service and are as fresh today as they were in 1931.

In Pakistan, where medical libraries are facing recurrent budgetary constraints, it is proving difficult to maintain adequate library services for the readers who must be provided timely and accurate biomedical information. The need of medical library cooperation in light of Ranganathan's five laws is discussed below.

Books are for use

The library material serves no purpose if it is not utilized as, library books are for use not for vanity. The library members never use most of the articles of journals subscribed by a library; some of the reference books are also rarely used. By sharing the resources with other medical libraries we can increase its usage.

Every reader his/her book

This law acknowledges the basic right of all users to be provided his/her required book/journal by the library. A library within limited resources cannot purchase each and every material but by cooperation among medical libraries we can achieve it. A book/journal required by a reader may not be available in our library but it may be available in some other library.

Every book its reader

The library purchases those books and journals, which are rarely used by its readers. These can be shared with other libraries and the fund can be spent on the books most read by the users.

Save the time of readers

Most researchers visit different libraries in search of their required article. This wastes lot of their time. A well organized library as well as cooperation among medical libraries can save the time of readers.²

The library is a growing organism

There is need for transformation in dealing with modern challenges. We need to plan and build with the expectation that the information exposure and its users will grow and change over time. Similarly, we need to move forward to library cooperation to keep our library services moving forward.

PAKISTAN'S PRESENT SCENERIO

No one library has ever been able to purchase everything a reader might want or need on a particular topic.³ The purchasing power of medical libraries is limited due to the inflation.⁴ It is the responsibility of medical institution to cooperate among each other, as no matter how small each contribute it will be beneficial to all.⁵ The information and communication technologies have paved the way for collaboration and interlibrary cooperation. The Internet can be used as a common carrier for linking the libraries. The medical libraries in west share their resources very effectively. In Pakistan and rest of Islamic countries, several steps have been taken for resource sharing:

- World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) had started EMRO Inter-Library Loan (ILL) and Documents Delivery Services. The medical libraries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region can be the member of this service by signing an agreement of willingness to cooperate among each other to exchange copies of journals articles and chapter of monographs where and when needed, taking into consideration not to violate the copyright Laws.⁶ This organization also compiles the Union Catalogue of Health Sciences Journals.⁷

- PASTIC is the premier organization to provide Scientific and technological information to the Scientists, Researchers and Citizens of Pakistan at a highly subsidized rate.⁸ Pakistan Scientific and Technological Information Center (PASTIC) Islamabad has published Union Catalogue of Scientific periodicals in the libraries of Pakistan in 2005. This union catalogue is also available online at PASTIC web site <http://www.pastic.gov.pk>. The first union catalogue of scientific and technical periodical holding was published in 1970 by PASTIC (erstwhile PANSDOC).
- COMSTECH Inter-Library Resource Network Service is a network of OIC libraries that can share their journal holdings with scientific community of the OIC Member states and provide free copies of research articles to the active research scientist. Under this program COMSTECH has networked the journal holdings of forty-five major libraries spread across fifteen OIC Member states.⁹
- Pakmedinet is the Pakistan's First Largest Indexed Database of Medical Journals of Pakistan. The site contains list of Pakistani Journals, their websites and link to order the full text articles from medical journals published in Pakistan.¹⁰
- Health researchers from Research and Development Institute Iran have devised EMRmedex database of scientific medical articles published in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This database is available online at website www.emromedex.com.¹¹
- Many medical journals in Pakistan have opted for their online editions. Online medical journals provide easy access to medical literature and are a source of potential regional cooperation.¹²

- Higher Education Commission (HEC) has started National Digital Library program. Through this program HEC centrally subscribe online databases of high quality/peer-reviewed journals. Public and private sector degree-awarding institutes and non-profit research institutes recognized by the Higher Education Commission are provided full text access to these databases.¹³

OBSTACLES

In spite of above initiatives, an effective and practical network of medical libraries in Pakistan needs to be established for resource sharing. The hurdles in medical library cooperation are as several.

- The finances as well as the absence of proper planning and leadership are the major obstacles for the medical library cooperation.¹⁴
- A major contribution to non-existence of resource sharing in medical libraries had been weak management and leadership quality of existing manpower in the field of medical librarianship.
- No training institute exists in Pakistan for proper training of medical librarians.
- The service structure for medical librarians in public sector institutions does not exist. Most institutions employee librarians in BPS 16 or 17 and are many retire in the same scale. The private sector medical institutions also do not offer an attractive pay package to the librarians.
- At present, most medical libraries for their library operation, including acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, serial management and literature search, are not using information and communication technologies.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are suggestions for the success of any future program of cooperation among medical libraries in Pakistan.

- A central body, like College of Physician and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP), should develop the Health Sciences Library Portal of Pakistan. Medical libraries should take responsibility to feed their journal holdings on this portal. They should also keep it up to date. Medical libraries should put their catalogue of library collection online and links to these catalogues should be provided on this portal.
- A document delivery section should be established in medical libraries, as it will be difficult for Librarian to allocate time every day for resource sharing out of routine work of the library. The staff of this section will be responsible to copy/scan the article or chapter from book and send these in response to requests. They will also be responsible to place request to libraries for article and other information required by their members, not available in their library. . In this regard, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) may require this for medical institutions.
- The Medical Librarians at regional level can share the load of subscription of medical journals and reference books. The Librarians of that region should meet one a year or so to decide what they can share and to decide the specific cataloguing standard to be used.
- CPSP may start a diploma course and specialization in medical librarianship in collaboration with WHO.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Medical libraries in Pakistan have no organized resource sharing system due to the absence of proper planning, lack of competent manpower, limited application of information and communications technology and absence of standards. PMDC and CPSP must play a leading role in developing cooperation among medical libraries and producing standards and cooperative tools like medical library portal and Document Delivery System in the medical libraries. The proper training of medical librarian and promotion incentives are also necessary for the improvement of medical library services.

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