

ROLE OF LIBRARY IN MEDICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

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The printed book has been man's closest friend from times immemorial. One can read and browse through the pages of a book for hours together, picking up odd bits of useful information, at one own pace. Printed books are permanent records, accessible at all times. Initially, "books" consisted of stone tablets of various sizes. Later papyrus was used till the Chinese invented paper.¹

As books became more and more popular it became necessary to have a central place where interested persons could access them. Then libraries came into being, the Sumerians in the 27th century BC being credited with the establishment of the first organized library.¹

Traditionally libraries have acquired print-based materials, including journals, newspapers, maps, pamphlets, illustrations and many other items as well as books; never confined to books only. Computer based sources of information were quickly added to the portfolios and there are now many libraries around the world which have very substantial collections of CD ROMs and electronic journals. Many publications are now "born digital" and a good proportion never appear in print form. Where they do, the digital and print versions are increasingly different in contents.²

Medical libraries in both teaching and non-teaching hospitals are for teaching staff only. A medical library is an integral part of a medical faculty and established for the purpose of providing professional education and research materials for the hospital teaching staff and research fellows.^{2,3}

Research is concerned primarily with the development and disclosure of new information, which it accomplishes by a variety of methods. The organization of knowledge into patterns, hypotheses, theories, and concepts provides the basis for the imaginative mind to conceive and conduct more research.⁴ It is well-known fact that the most sophisticated research is conducted only in coordination with the most sophisticated systems for handling information.⁴

New medical information is accumulating at an astonishing rate, available in many forms and flavors. Information seekers benefit in search of answers to clinical problems.⁵ Problems in

evaluating medical informatics projects may be overcome by formulating system development work in terms of a testable hypothesis, subdividing complex projects into modules. Each of these modules can be developed, tested and evaluated rigorously; and utilizing qualitative studies in situations where more definitive quantitative studies are impractical.

Health sciences libraries have considerable potential as resources for both formal continuing professional education, as well as the informal continuing education. While there is a growing interest in making the resources of health sciences libraries more accessible to practitioners on routine day-to-day basis, there also needs to be more awareness of how, when, where, and why professionals look for information in the context of practical problems.⁶

The rapid accumulation of data through increasingly sophisticated computer technology has created an unprecedented information explosion. Data collection based on quantity rather than quality, speed of transmission rather than reliability or relevance, poses a challenge to the future of librarianship.⁷ Libraries can also assist the researchers by means of computerized literature searches (Medline, ExtraMed, Internet etc.) and the use of indexes, abstracts, and other forms of printed references materials. Efficient use of library helps in conducting research.⁸ By offering such services, libraries can provide faculty members with a qualitative analysis of where and how their research is cited and its impact in the fields of biomedicine and related health sciences.⁹

MEDICAL RESEARCH IN PAKISTAN

Authentic research and its use for development is almost non-existent in our setup. Whatever little research is being carried out, especially in the medical field, is fragmented and ends up, at best, on the shelves of libraries and offices. Hence conferences, meetings and symposia fail miserably in drawing conclusion & recommendation for development.¹⁰

In Pakistan, medical research has been compartmentalized. Major epidemiological projects are financed by international organizations like WHO and UNICEF. These projects are designed

properly and are methodologically sound. However, the results of these studies are usually published in the form of technical reports, which have a very limited circulation and never reach the desk of a common physician. Consequently, a physician, working even in a teaching hospital, is not aware of the findings.¹¹

In a local study it was stated that the major reasons for poor research activity in Pakistan were poor research training and awareness. Though the attitudes towards research were positive, they were deficient practically in terms of reading and writing literature.

Postgraduate education is always research oriented. For a fast changing field like medicine, a doctor should very regularly read the current medical publications. Medical research throughout the world is published in medical journals and ultimately in book forms.

Doctors do not write because they do not read the current literature. Culture of reading in libraries is fading. Most of our libraries have a core collection of medical books only. They are deficient in the periodical literature, and computer search facilities to their researcher. Many of our medical libraries do not subscribe to any medical journals at all.¹²

In first WHO-Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) regional conference on Medical Journals at Cairo, Egypt, the Pakistani representatives stated that doctors usually write research papers, thesis, dissertations, for their promotion, getting degrees, and diplomas. And after getting their targets, they give up writing because they do not have time or interest to write papers, thesis, dissertations.¹³

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Research oriented projects, assignments, should be included in undergraduate, postgraduate education. This will increase the use of library and its resources for their research.
- The libraries should be well equipped with the latest computers and Internet facilities for up-to-date research materials.
- Medical libraries at teaching hospitals as well as non-teaching hospitals should have latest medical books, journals, index services, reference materials, CD ROMs materials, audio-visual material and other research facilities.
- Undergraduate and postgraduate medical

students should be encouraged to go to libraries for reading journals and books.

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