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Implementation of Electronic Library Services in a Hospital Environment: an Overview

Introduction

The implementation of electronic library services in hospital libraries in Hungary is a long and laborious process.
The library law of 1960 has created a national network of 338 (1) medical libraries managed by the *National Medical Library and Information Center* (2). The center built the central catalog and the central list of periodicals, helped and coordinated the co-operation, the acquisitions of foreign books and periodicals, the methodology and the training of librarians in the member institutions (3). The *National Medical Library and Information Center* also published The Medical Librarian (4), a periodical on medical information and the problems and methodology of medical libraries in Hungary. This is a network of institutions from diverse fields of health and medicine; libraries of medical universities, county- and city hospitals, pharmaceutical factories, welfare centers, sanatoriums and research institutions. Their maintenance and operation is still regulated by the library laws of 1976 and 1978.

Medical Libraries in a Hospital Environment

We have nineteen libraries within this network sponsored by county hospitals. They form a unique cluster in the system of the hungarian medical libraries because of their similarity in financial and working conditions.

The collection interest in these libraries cover the fields of the departments of their parent institutions. They provided place, staff and document supply for the libraries. Our existence and development has always depended on the parent institutions' attitude to the operation of the library. Library rooms and staff were often used and employed for non-library purposes.

Besides monetary problems in acquisitions we had to cope with the absence of sufficient literature for assistants and nurses.

In spite of our difficulties at the beginning, the present size of the stock in these libraries amounts to 10.000 – 30.000 volumes of monographs

and periodicals with the two extremes of 3.000 and 50.000 volumes. Most of the 70-80 periodicals currently published in Hungary can be found in our libraries. The number of current foreign periodicals is 50-130 per library, out of which twenty-eight are one-copy journals.

In the last few years we have subscribed to periodicals in new fields like AIDS, hospice, home-care.

There are one to six librarians per library, not all having library background. We did have organized training until the National Medical Library and Information Center stopped its central services in 1990. Librarians have a general training at colleges and universities, then they educate themselves in special fields like medical information and therminology.

Over the past three decades we have offered traditional library services like reading room services, circulation, interlibrary loan, SDI and bibliographical services. Every library in our system has a card catalogue. The shelving system (5) in most of the libraries is based on the structure of the National Medical Bibliography (6) and was developed by the National Medical Library and Information Center. Except photocopying our services are free for the heath staff of the whole county. All of our services are free for the staff of the county hospitals.

The new media 'penetrated' into county hospital libraries in the 1980s. Audio- (sounds of heartbeats), videocassettes (in anatomy, hygienical gymnastics, home nursing) and online databases (ASCA, DIMDI, DATASTAR) appeared, although the latter was available for us only indirectly through academic libraries.

New Trends in the Development of County Hospital Libraries

After 1989 hungarian libraries had to face a more restricted financial situation and a new way of obtaining money for structural and technical development was by applying for grants. Five of the eight competing county hospital libraries won money for stock development, computers and Internet access and we are waiting for the decision of two foundations The National Széchényi Library also won a project for supporting interlibrary loans.

The concept of stock development has changed in the last decade with the exponential growth of literature and of publishers, and the appearance of new fields related to the operation of hospitals (law, quality control, environmental sanitation, new international standards).

The method of serials acquisition today is by tender, considering the prices and reliability of the services.

The revolution in informatics and computer science had an effect on libraries comparable only to that of the printing press in the 15th century. We could not keep up with the academic and public libraries in the automation of library processes, not being able to purchase the integrated library systems (7) developed especially for them. A number of our libraries do have computers, but in the absence of affordable library systems we decided to build our own systems module by module using Micro-ISIS for cataloguing, serials and creating stock-lists. This program however is not suitable for circulation, so we are planning to apply new softwares like TINLIB, TEXTLIB. Co-operation and coordination among hospital libraries is more important than ever, since we want to have all library processes automated and our databases being compatible to form a national network.

Our readers' most urgent need however is the fastest access to the latest information. That is why he twenty-seven computers in sixteen hospital libraries are used for supplying databases. Four of the nineteen libraries subscribe to the Current Contents Life Sciences or Clinical Medicine on floppy disc and fourteen of them have access to various forms and volumes of Medline (Express, Standard, Dialog). Information and computer science has become part of the curriculum at medical universities, so the younger generation of doctors can use these information resources by themselves. The older generation of our users however needs the librarians' help and guidance – and I have to tell you that this is perhaps the most beautiful part of our job.

Multimedia, the integration of textual, visual and audible data, can be found only in two of the hospital libraries because of the expenses. Our multimedia CD-ROMs Thyroid, Gastroenterology and Anatomy help the physicians' work in diagnostics and therapy and contains questions to tests the acquired knowledge.

At present only four out of the nineteen county hospital libraries have access to the Internet's vast amount of information.

The tasks and purposes of medical libraries have been changed by the reform in higher education (7). We help the education and research of the staff of the parent institutions. A number of county hospitals serve as a training ground in medical and health education, their libraries take part in PhD courses and in the accreditation of the parent institution. We help the staff's scientific work not only with information but also by providing the necessary technical devices (scanner, photocopying machine, slide

projector, overhead projector, tv, video, fax, etc.). We supply our users with impact factor indexes but we cannot afford Science Citation Index.

Conclusion

The automation of library processes and the use of computers in hospital libraries have made our work easier and our services more efficient but we are still lacking the necessary infrastructure to provide our users the fastest and most up-to-date information. Our goal is to create equal opportunity of access to scientific information for the users of all members of our national network. A new network center, the National Association of Medical Librarians (8) was formed last year to help medical libraries and librarians to cope with the new demands of a new century.

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