

## The role of the information specialist in the context of Health Technology Assessment

Background: Health Technology Assessment (HTA) is a method of evaluating new and existing (bio)medical interventions with regard to different aspects, e.g. the efficacy and safety of an intervention, its appropriate use and efficiency, its effectiveness in everyday life, its cost effectiveness, the organizational implications of the intervention, or its societal acceptance. The term “medical intervention” comprises equipment, medical devices, drugs, medical methods and procedures as well as health services and others. The conclusions or recommendations published in comprehensive or rapid assessments are based on the best available evidence, however gaps in the evidence are also pointed out. To minimize retrieval bias, a systematic search of the existing knowledge base is crucial. The primary studies identified thereby are analysed in a way that makes the results comprehensible.

The important role of the information specialist is inherent in the scientific approach of HTAs: The information specialist guarantees the consistency, reproducibility, and transparency of the literature search due to his/her expertise. In comparison to information brokers and librarians who only conduct literature searches, the information specialist is more involved in the particular scientific project and optimizes its search strategy.

Objectives: This poster will outline the skills of a librarian necessary to work as an information specialist in a HTA institute. He or she needs expert knowledge of

- the design of complex search strategies
- the characteristics of various databases
- the development of filters for special research questions
- the reliability (weaknesses or strengths) of published search filters
- the relevancy of sources for a specific enquiry
- the use of software tools for managing bibliographic references.

In some institutions the information specialist is also involved in the critical appraisal of published clinical research or data extraction and needs, therefore, a deep understanding of epidemiology and statistics. In addition, the information specialist is also responsible for the dissemination of the assessments produced by the own organization. This entails work as a webmaster as well as the implementation of an institutional repository. Extensive computer literacy is beneficial.

Method: A descriptive model of the HTA process will be used in order to demonstrate the responsibilities of the information specialist in the context of HTA. The illustrated workflow will be taken from the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Health Technology Assessment in Vienna and serves as an example for similar workflows at other HTA institutions. In addition, a short list of links and references will be provided.

A survey concerning the importance of information specialists in HTA institutions was conducted in the beginning of 2007 by the Catalan Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Research (CAHTA). The results of this survey shall be published in September 2007 on the website of the European Network for Health Technology Assessment (<http://www.eunethta.net/>). These results will broaden the example pointed out by this poster.