

The skill to formulate an informative offer able to meet users' needs: Experience of the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine Scientific Library (Lodz, Poland)

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Abstract

Medical libraries serve a specific group of users who expect to be provided with useful, reliable, and frequently most recent information in the areas of their interest. The library's well organized collections, easy access to relevant electronic resources, making use of other libraries' collections, and the establishment of a well organized workspace designed for the librarian create the basis for efficient and quick delivery of informative materials. In view of a growing integration of many fields of science and an increasing number of multi-center studies, collections on medical sciences only are regarded as insufficient. To support interdisciplinary scientific research, librarians employed in medical libraries should be well acquainted with many fields of knowledge and equipped with the skill to easily navigate around the world of information (technology, natural sciences, humanities) resources. The Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine (NIOM) Scientific Library, specialized in occupational medicine understood in its broadest sense, collects materials and publications on general medicine, toxicology, pharmacology, public health, work hygiene, and health care organization. These are being supplemented with collections on psychology, sociology, epidemiology, chemistry, physics, law, and chemical safety. Moreover, publications from other Polish and foreign libraries are ordered for the NIOM employees. The poster presents the network of libraries in Poland, which cooperated with the NIOM Scientific Library to acquire copies of various documents (in the years 2000–2006). To meet informative needs of research workers, the building up of the NIOM Scientific Library's own collection was based not only on collections of large medical libraries (system doc@med), but also on libraries operating at different universities of medicine, technology, agriculture, humanities, natural sciences, and others, as well as on small libraries with highly specialized collections. To ensure an easy access to collections of other libraries it is necessary to employ modern instruments facilitating the transfer of documents, to foster efficient inter-library cooperation, and to be acquainted with updated informative offers presented by academic libraries. Professional experience of medical librarians plays an important role in meeting the requirements of users.

Introduction

The dynamic progress of science makes it feasible to undertake highly sophisticated and very fruitful studies, and this in turn leads to the development of highly specialized fields. Nevertheless to solve many research problems, it is necessary to possess general knowledge as well as the ability to synthesize the results of studies carried out in many different areas. This raises a number of questions:

- Can a specialized but small medical library ensure an easy access to broad general knowledge and to knowledge of multifarious fields of science?
- How can it satisfy the information needs of library users?
- What skills are needed to be a good medical librarian?

The analysis presented here is an attempt to answer these and other questions in order to determine how to formulate an accurate informative offer in view of varied needs of the medical library users.

Methods

In this analysis the NIOM Scientific Library used its own statistical data to identify Polish libraries where the requests for copies of publications were placed in the years 2000–2006. The number of libraries, their types, and locations were ascertained as well as the number of the requests filled.

Results

Number of cooperating libraries

In 2000–2006, requests for copies of various publications were made to 121 Polish scientific libraries. Permanent cooperation has been established with 24 (20%) libraries. Collections of other libraries were used when needed.

Types of libraries

Four major types of libraries cooperating with the NIOM Scientific Library were distinguished:

- Medical libraries (medical libraries operating at medical universities, medical research institutes and the Main Medical Library in Warsaw)
- Libraries of technical and natural sciences (operating at universities of technology and agriculture, and research institutes specialized in these fields of science)
- Libraries of humanities and economic sciences (operating at universities and higher schools of economy)
- Other libraries, including the National Library in Warsaw.

Localization of libraries

Libraries where NIOM requests were placed in the period under study are located throughout Poland (22 cities) (Fig. 1). Most (50%) of libraries are located in Warsaw. The remaining libraries are located in the major Polish cities (Krakow, Lodz, Wroclaw, Gdansk, Szczecin) and in several smaller ones, where specialized scientific centers operate (e.g., Institute of Pomology and Floriculture, Skierniewice, Higher Business School – National Louis University, Nowy Sacz, Institute of Environmental Engineering and Center of Polymer Chemistry of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Zabrze, Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, Sosnowiec).

Number of publications

The analysis showed that 73% of all publications ordered were acquired from medical libraries, including those of medical universities (50%) and research institutes (23%) (Fig. 2). Successive places are occupied by libraries of universities of technology and agriculture and research institutes specialized in these fields of science (22%). Publications ordered from libraries specialized in humanities in economics make up only 4%, whereas 1% of articles was obtained from other libraries.

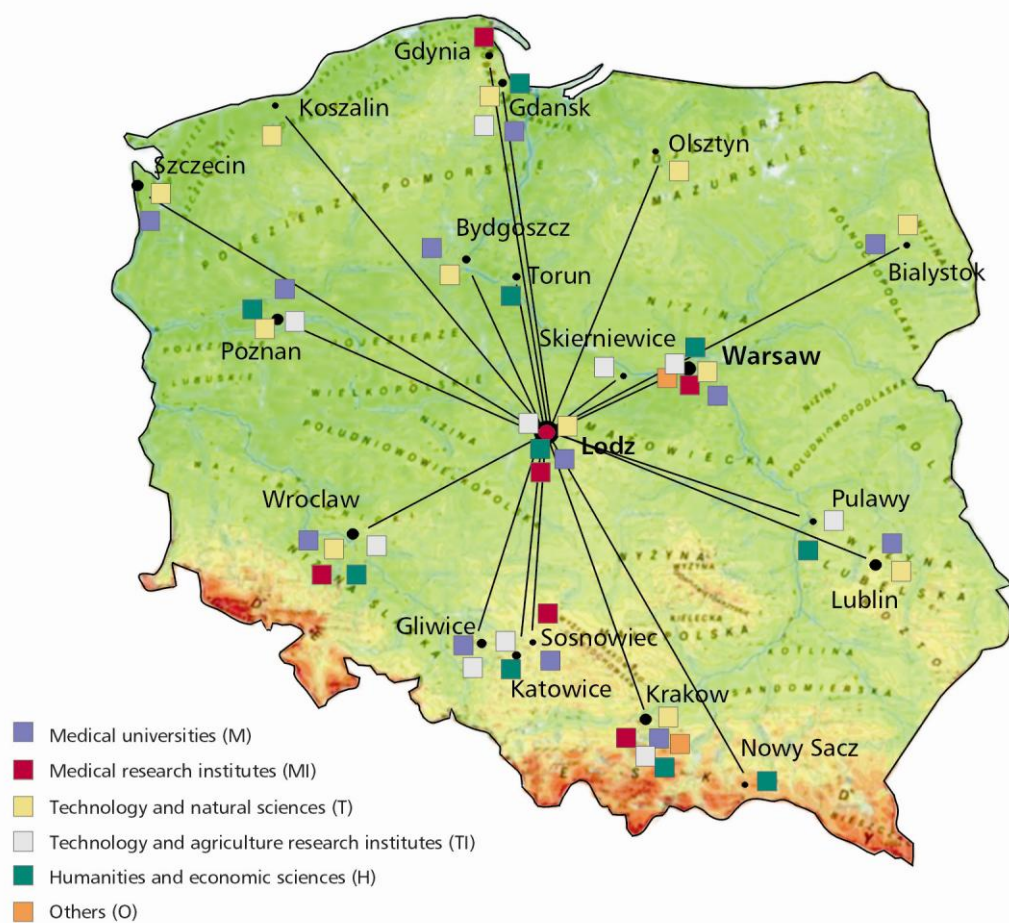


Fig. 1. Location of libraries cooperating with the NIOM Medical Library

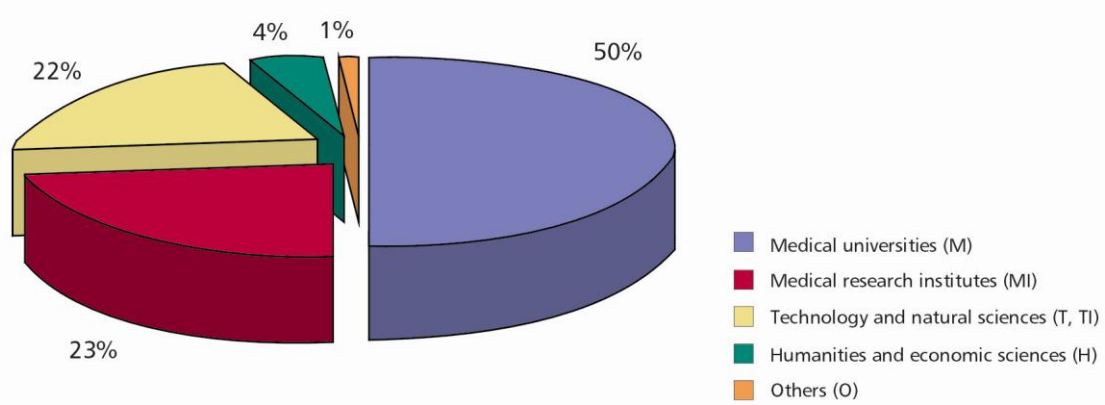


Fig. 2. A percentage share of individual libraries in filling orders of the NIOM Scientific Library.

Conclusions

Medical libraries must establish their own appropriate collections and participate in offers of other libraries to satisfy the interdisciplinary needs of medical library users. In the field of medical sciences, collections of the largest Polish medical libraries are used. Cooperation with small specialized libraries is also essential as it often happens that these libraries have a particular, desired publication in their collections or subscribe a given journal.

The ability to formulate an appropriate information offer in view of varied needs of small medical library users includes:

- The establishment of the library's own thematic collection
 - (a) to define the collection profile,
 - (b) to assemble the main specialized collection,
 - (c) to acquire the most up-to-date publications.
- The assurance of access to external sources
 - (a) to identify and use collections of other libraries,
 - (b) to manage access to selected journals, books and online data bases,
 - (c) to identify and use the access of free-of-charge online sources.
- The advancement of professional qualifications of librarians
 - (a) to be well acquainted with specialized biomedical terminology,
 - (b) to be well oriented in the field of the library specialization,
 - (c) to be able to identify sources of general knowledge,
 - (d) to understand needs of potential users,
 - (e) to make use of modern information technologies.

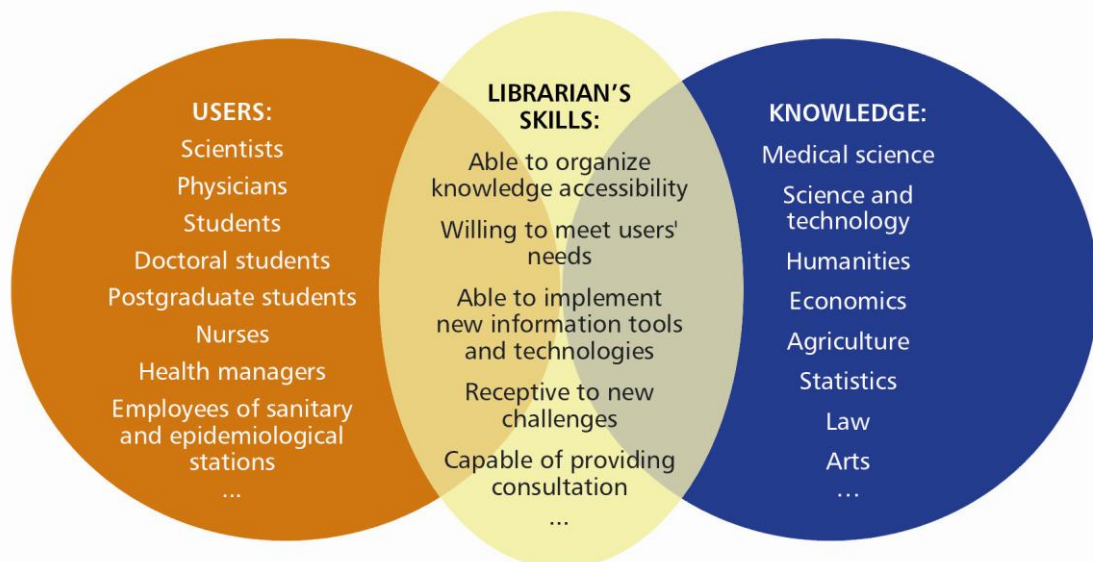


Fig. 3. The librarian's mediation role in the organization of the access to knowledge

A competent medical librarian plays the role of a guide in searching and organizing access to the source of specialized medical and wealth of general knowledge (Fig. 3).