What do users perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of librarian-mediated and unmediated evidence/knowledge searches?

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Brighton and Sussex NHS Library and Knowledge Service
We are based in three libraries in Brighton and Hove and mid-Sussex in the south of England.

We serve:
- Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Brighton and Sussex Medical School
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Sussex Community NHS Trust
- CCGs: NHS Brighton and Hove, NHS High Weald, NHS Lewes and Havens, NHS Horsham and Mid Sussex
- South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Trust

31 staff including 13 professional librarians
Evidence searches

In 2016 the team carried out 503 searches for 318 unique individuals.

Acute hospitals trust: 76%
Mental health trust: 9%
Community trust: 7%
Clinical commissioners: 4.5%
Medical school: 2%
Other: 1.5%

Doctors: 46%
Nurses and midwives: 20%
Allied health professionals: 14%
Professional, scientific and technical: 10%
Others: 10%
Reasons for searches

Searches in 2016

Primary reasons for searches
Literature was reviewed via a search of Medline, PubMed, EMBASE, LISA, LISTA, PLoS and ERIC.

A handful of studies have evaluated search quality and the impact of librarian involvement.

No previous studies have qualitatively compared librarian-mediated searches with users’ own searches.
Methods

A survey (Google Forms) was piloted with library staff in April 2017.

After amendments, circulated to everyone with an email address who requested an evidence search from Brighton and Sussex NHS LKS in the calendar year 2016 (n=316).

297 potential recipients after invalid emails were removed.

46 responses (15.5%).
Results

Q1 Use of bibliographic databases

• 35/46 respondents (76%), searched bibliographic databases themselves, as well as requesting librarian-mediated searches.

Q2 Search perceptions

• We offered respondents a series of statements about search quality and asked them to tell us whether they considered their own or librarian-mediated searches to be better.
Results

Q2 statements

- A range of databases and resources are searched
- Search results are produced quickly
- The search topic is well understood
- The search strategy is focused on the search topic
- The search strategy is comprehensive
- The search approach is methodical
- The search results include relevant material
- The search results are applicable to clinical/organisational practice
- The search results may reliably be used to change practice
- Searches are cost-effective
Results

Linear scale ranked 1-5

1 = their own searches are better
5 = librarian-mediated searches are better

11 respondents offered no answers to these questions

I don’t search because the library staff do it so much better than I do
Question 2, ranked by strong preference for mediated searches
Results tested using a one-sided $\chi^2$ test.

Responses for all questions significantly favoured librarians ($p=>0.01$) apart from question 2.3 ($p=0.08$), which asked how well the search topic had been understood.
Analysis

Q3 Additional comments

The following themes were identified and reinforced the Q2 responses:

• Mediated searches save time

• Mediated searches provide reassurance that nothing has been missed

• Mediated searches are more systematic and methodical
Analysis

It seems to take me ages.

It would have taken me ages to do such a thorough search.

The library staff are always able to find something relevant that I can't.

It reassures me that I have covered all bases and have not missed out on any relevant papers.

Saves a lot of time with own personal and inefficient and non-methodical searches.

Thorough, comprehensive literature reviews presented quickly.
Discussion

Respondents considered librarian-mediated searches to be significantly better than end-user searches.

Qualities most frequently considered to make a difference:
- range of databases and resources searched
- a methodical approach
- comprehensiveness
- reliability of results
- cost-effectiveness
Understanding of the search topic

This was the only area in which clinicians did not perceive mediated searches to be significantly superior.
Limitations

Low response rate (15%)

Conducted with the users of a single (large) library and knowledge service

Not possible to assess whether the sample was representative of all those who requested searches as responses were returned anonymously
Conclusions and implications

Librarian-mediated searches are perceived to save time and are considered authoritative.

Weaker understanding of the search question in librarian-mediated searches could be addressed.

Opportunity to use data to demonstrate impact and promote the service.

Future research should examine user-perceptions of value with larger populations.
Further reading


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