

Librarians, Informationists, and Swiss Army Knives

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It is generally accepted that implementation of web-based resources greatly reduces the need for users to physically visit a library on a regular basis [1]. This reduction in face-to-face contact can also lead to a loss of visibility and a sense of irrelevance in the eyes of the hospital administration. These issues present medical librarians with a challenge and opportunity to once again redefine the role of the librarian and library in the organization.

The Arnold Library recently completed its first renovation in over thirty years. With the shift from predominantly paper to electronic resources, use of the physical space and the role of the librarian had to be addressed in the library's strategic plan. The renovated space—equipped with flexible seating, nesting tables, networked printers, conference phone, large screen monitor, and white board—makes it an ideal learning and planning facility. Much like the famous Swiss army knife, the library space is now easily reconfigured as needed for each situation. Shortly after the renovation, the library served as a 24/7 command center for the hospital-wide, two-week roll-out of a new medical monitoring technology system. The library now regularly serves as a space for clinical webinars, specialized training, and, of course, library instruction.

Along with the increased opportunity for face-to-face meetings, each interaction strengthens the role of the librarian as a professional collaborator within the organization. This role as collaborator is essential to the success of the 21st century library [2]. The cumulative effect of these interactions is to enhance the image of the librarian as a provider of information in a variety of settings and provide an informal, spontaneous opportunity to promote information literacy.

Beyond adding flexibility to the physical space, librarians can serve the organization in the role of “informationist.” The term is not yet widely used but will become increasingly important as the relationship between librarians and organizations evolve. The requirement for an undergraduate or graduate degree in another field for the master of library science degree, along with additional professional experience, gives librarians the potential to enhance organizational capacity in unique ways [3].

My prior experience as a biologist and nuclear medicine technologist afforded useful supplemental knowledge to my position as librarian/informationist, in which I serve in functions beyond the “traditional librarian.” One of the

duties is to attend regularly scheduled meetings with the chief medical officer to discuss information needs and resources relevant to new areas of focus in the organization. My position includes participation in pediatric rounds. If residents have a clinical question, I can make note of it and provide information and other resources that they might not be aware of. My position also includes participation as a member of a team investigating a new clinical procedure. Beyond providing traditional bibliographic support for the team, I am involved in general discussions about the goals and structure of the project.

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Given the current economic environment and scarcity of resources, librarians need to reinvent, re-justify, and restate their relevancy in their parent organizations. In my case, the hospital mission, goals, and objectives were listed, and parallel supporting goals, and objectives were developed for the library. The crosswalk between these two documents serves as a strategic planning guide and identifies possible ways in which the librarian can support the organization beyond traditional bibliographic document delivery. Regular review of the library strategic plan through the lens of the hospital information needs ensures that the library and librarian will continue to remain relevant regardless of rapid changes in information access, delivery, and technology.

References

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