

Clinical librarianship challenges in Iran

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and categorize the challenges of clinical librarianship in Iran. First, based on literature review and opinions of participants, the main challenges were identified and categorized. Then, a questionnaire based on this categorization was distributed among the participants for ranking. According to the results, the four main challenges include educational, cultural, executive and research challenges. These challenges lead to lack of consistency and limited success of clinical librarianship efforts. In order to perform a more generalized identification of these challenges and problems, it is necessary to conduct further studies at national and international levels.

Key words: librarians; hospitals; Iran.

Introduction

Today, the role of clinical librarians as one of the key elements of evidence-based medicine (EBM) is undeniable. Clinical librarians provide timely information to physicians in order to improve patients' health. Furthermore, it is possible to solve problems regarding time, cost, and skills necessary for retrieval of medical information in EBM process with the help of clinical librarians (1).

Cimpl, in a review of clinical librarianship literature, states that the goal of clinical medical librarianship (CML) services is to provide timely and accurate information for physicians and other members of medical teams, affecting the information seeking behaviors of physicians and improving their library skills. As a result, he proposed to create a role for medical librarians as an important member of medical teams (2, 3). On the other hand, the results of studies regarding the effects of clinical librarianship services on patients show that these services can help improve patient care (4, 5) and also lead to reduced treatment costs (6).

In studies regarding clinical librarianship in Iran, the necessity of clinical librarianship services and physicians' interest in these services have been reported (7, 8). Most physicians believe that clinical librarianship services are necessary in order to improve medical services and are interested in the implementation of these services in the hospital (9). They have also suggested the implementation of clinical librarianship projects in various hospital wards (10). However, despite the increasing favor toward EBM in Iran in recent years, the role of clinical librarians has not been considered in Iran's healthcare system (11). Identifying the challenges and problems leading to this lack of attention toward clinical librarians in Iran can highlight the problems and help the efforts in overcoming these challenges. Therefore, the goal of the current study is to identify challenges and problems of implementing clinical librarianship services in Iran.

Local context

This study was conducted based on clinical librarianship efforts in Department of Gastroenterology of AlZahra

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hospital. AlZahra hospital is an educational hospital supervised by Isfahan University of Medical Sciences with various departments and wards. Department of Gastroenterology is one the most important departments in this hospital, with long experience in diagnosis and treatment of Gastroenterological problems and performing procedures such as endoscopy, colonoscopy, ERCP and other related procedures. This department was opened in the year 2000 and consists of 13 rooms, 29 active beds, 8 Gastroenterology specialists (faculty members of the university) and 20 members of nursing staff.

Clinical librarianship services in Gastroenterology Department were implemented in the year 2015 with help from the department of medical librarianship of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. To this day, three pilot programs for clinical librarianship have been implemented in this department (two, morning report programs and one, Grand round program). Currently, two clinical librarians among graduate students of librarianship and medical informatics provide clinical librarianship services to clinical teams, extern students and fellowship students in this department. These implemented pilot programs have also helped identify the initial challenges and problems of clinical librarianship programs (12).

Methods

First step: in order to create a general outlook, a review of the related literature was conducted and possible barriers and challenges were identified.

Second step: in this step, the main research question investigated was: "In your opinion, what are the main challenges of clinical librarianship in Iran?" This question was sent to member of Clinical Informationist and Librarian Assistant (CILA) team of Alzahra hospital (including 3 clinical librarians and one Gastroenterology specialist), 3 university faculty members and 3 graduate students of librarianship and medical informatics of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences with experience in the field of clinical librarianship using Telegram™ messenger application and their answers were gathered using the same method.

Third step: the qualitative data gathered during the first and second steps were coded by two researchers and main themes and subthemes were extracted.

Fourth step: in this step, all themes and subthemes

extracted in the third step were sent to the participants and their opinions were gathered. After gathering their responses, the main challenges were ranked separately by two researchers and any disagreements were discussed until an agreement was reached.

Results

Based on the results of this study, four main challenges were identified in clinical librarianship in Iran including educational, executive, cultural and research challenges (*Table 1*). The most important challenge was the educational challenge. The majority of participants in the study mentioned that current curriculum for Bachelor and Master level education in librarianship and medical informatics doesn't prepare the graduates for work as clinical librarians. There is also a distinct lack of useful workshops in this regard. This lack of education had led to limited knowledge and skill in librarianship graduates. Current curriculums in medicine and other medical fields also don't familiarize physicians and other clinical experts with the use of EBM. Therefore, it is necessary to design and implement a new curriculum for various health librarianship courses as well as foster interdisciplinary cooperation in order to familiarize the graduates with new concepts and knowledge.

The next important challenge was the executive challenges which were divided into organizational and management and technological challenges. One of the most important factors in organizational and management area was the lack of existing official clinical librarian positions in hospitals which created obstacles when employing clinical librarians. Furthermore, there is also no predetermined organization for creating guidelines and managing clinical librarianship efforts. In the technological dimension, lack of access to proper hardware and software, low internet speed and lack of access to evidence-based databases were among the challenges preventing implementation of sustained clinical librarianship services.

Cultural challenges were also divided into two categories: personal and group. Some of these challenges were related to librarians while others were related to hospitals, specialists and clinical teams. Low self-esteem in librarians was one of the most important challenges in this regard. On the other hand, due to lack of knowledge about clinical

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librarianship services, there was a negative attitude toward these services in clinical teams. The next challenge was the fact that not many studies

had attempted to identify existing problems and propose solutions for these problems for clinical librarianship services.

Rank	Challenges		Examples
1	Educational		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low quality of current educational courses • Lack of proper and sustained workshops and training programs • Lack of attention to EBM in medical education • Low skill in librarians and specialists • Lack of librarians' familiarity with clinical environments • Lack of proper knowledge in librarians regarding medical terminology
2	Executive	Organizational and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of organizational positions for clinical librarians in hospitals • Lack of proper authority for guidance and management • Financial and budget problems • Lack of sustainability and success in clinical librarianship programs
		Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to proper and sufficient hardware and software • Lack of access to evidence-based databases • Low internet speed
3	Cultural	Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-esteem in librarians • Negative attitude in clinical teams regarding clinical librarians • Negative attitude of hospital managers toward clinical librarians • Lack of knowledge regarding clinical librarianship services in specialists
		Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of acceptance for clinical librarianship among hospital managers • Lack of acceptance of clinical librarianship services among clinical teams • Weak interpersonal relations (between clinical librarians and medical teams)
4	Research		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A limited number of studies in this area (lack of identified problems and needs, limited proposed solutions and lack of evaluation methods for clinical librarianship services).

Table 1. *Clinical librarianship challenges in Iran.*

Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to identify and categorize challenges of clinical librarianship in Iran. Previous studies have indicated the importance of clinical librarianship services and their effect on the quality of healthcare services and also show an interest in clinical specialists regarding these services (1-12). However, there are numerous challenges and problems for implementation of clinical librarianship services many of which lead to lack of success and sustainability in clinical librarianship efforts in Iran. This study was carried out in the limited time period and in a small population. Therefore, only some general challenges in this area are mentioned. Identifying all challenges in clinical librarianship and proposing proper solutions requires further national and international studies.

According to the study results, there are some research questions which require further study in the future:

1. Is the current educational curriculum in health librarianship enough for creating suitable clinical librarians or is there a need for special training in this regard?
2. In case of a need for special training, it is necessary for these training programs to be part of a university degree or is it better to offer than in a short-term and modular format?
3. Is clinical librarianship simply a profession and what are the professional competencies of a clinical librarian?
4. What are the research requirements for clinical librarians and what are the preferable directions for future studies?
5. How can be overcome cultural challenges regarding clinical librarianship?
6. What is the professional identity of clinical librarians? Is clinical librarianship a socially acceptable position?

Submitted on invitation.

Accepted on 14 May 2018.

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