



Standards for Iranian Hospital Libraries: Why do Hospital Libraries Need to be Standardized?

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Abstract

Received: 12 Dec 2020

Accepted: 2 Jan 2021

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The objective of developing the National Standard for Hospital Libraries (NSHL) is to present an efficient tool to replace scientific methods with traditional ones. The standards should be designed to be used as a comprehensive guide for librarians working in hospitals in various fields. Various standards are currently being developed for national, public, and academic libraries. Despite the activity of more than 200 educational and medical centers and a large number of public and private medical centers in Iran, there was no comprehensive standard that could meet this group of libraries' expectations. Therefore, the development of a standard for hospital libraries began based on national research. Finally, this standard was prepared in four chapters, including mission and organization, strategic planning, resources management, and service management. This standard was handed over to the Iranian National Standards Organization and the Deputy for Research and Technology of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education to be available to users and stakeholders. The NSHL is a comprehensive guideline for establishing and developing hospital libraries and applies to all hospital libraries, both public and private.

Introduction

Nowadays, standards play a crucial role as a necessity in people's lives and developed societies, and through them, scientific methods replace traditional methods. The standardization guarantees quality and prevents waste of costs. A standard is a document provides instructions or features for processes that are presented to achieve the desired results. Standards should be the codified results-based of science, technology, and experience, and their goals are to promote society's interests (1). On the other hand, libraries are considered as one of the most important and influential cultural and scientific centers in all organizations/countries.

There are various types of libraries, including the national library, the public library, the academic library, and the specialized libraries, defined based on the target groups, specialized services, and equipment.

In today's world, libraries are a cultural center with extensive and effective services to promote knowledge, health, and productivity of leisure for society. Hospital libraries are considered as specialized libraries. Access to up-to-date information in the medical profession is vital, and this information utilization significantly affects the diagnosis and prevention of diseases, as well as decisions



about treatment approaches. Hospital libraries help hospitals accomplish their most important mission (2).

In recent years, we have seen a reduction in the half-life of information and a reduction in doubling-time information volume. In a hospital, physicians' main activity is usually the treatment of patients; this can lead to requesting information and using medical-scientific texts (3). Access to up-to-date information is vital in the medical profession, and the use of this information has a significant impact on the quality of diagnosis, prevention, and decision-making in treatment methods. Asadi Shali, quoting Haug, points out in his research that the greatest concern in medicine is physicians' timely access to reliable sources of information (3) because medical decisions do not depend solely on prior physicians' information and knowledge. In this regard, hospital libraries are crucial for collecting, storing, and disseminating medical information in hospitals (4). Hospital library to support the activities of education, research, and specialized medical and paramedical disciplines in hospitals are obliged to provide the information required by users including doctors, nurses, paramedics, residents, students and researchers, and other staff of the organization to improve the quality of patient care (3). Due to significant changes in the performance of other medical departments of the hospital, the future challenges of hospital libraries play a vital role in the treatment process and promote public health. Following the increasing volume of information, standard hospital libraries' development will lead to libraries' survival and increase their services quality. The standards clearly define library activities' scope and make it clear that the library's goals are to provide users' needs and hospital administrators' decision-making. In large countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany, standardization for hospital libraries has been initiated since the 1950s. The existing standards have changed and developed during these years due to the hospital library's expectations and library services changes (5).

The first hospital library in Iran officially started operating in 1330 in Imam Khomeini Hospital in Tehran. Unfortunately, after more than six decades of hospital libraries' emergence, there is still no practical definition of the Iranian hospital libraries and their services. A study of Iranian hospital libraries and its comparison with some existing international standards shows no criteria or guidelines for establishing hospital libraries and their various sections. Hospital libraries face significant shortcomings in human resources, space, and equipment (2). Access to information technology and related training in hospital libraries is also essential (6). In terms of financial resources, the vast majority of libraries do not have a dedicated budget, so they have a major problem in providing up-to-date resources.

Given the vital role of hospital libraries in providing specialized scientific information to the medical staff and improving their users' scientific level, these libraries have received more attention in recent years. Also, considering the hospital libraries' accreditation and its role in improving the quality of the library services, which has gained special importance among hospital managers, especially in recent years, the development of a standard for the hospital library is crucial (7). Most of the problems are due to the lack of this standard. Therefore, standardization of the hospital library's services, functions, and equipment is essential.

National and international associations and institutions

have always considered the development of standards. Also, experts in various fields have developed standards at the national level, with the approval of the Iranian National Standards Organization. Due to hospital libraries' specific characteristics in terms of space, users' information needs, and the lack of a comprehensive standard for this group of libraries, the development of hospital library standards was a necessity. The lack of a proper national model for running a hospital library has led this library group to fall far short of its core mission. Therefore, the standard for Iranian hospital libraries has been developed based on national research and relevant national and international standards. This standard has been developed with a comprehensive view of hospital libraries' needs in the areas of mission and organization, strategic planning, resource management, and service management. The present standard will not only be efficient and effective in setting up hospital libraries but can also be used as a tool for evaluating and accrediting these libraries and as a model for improving their conditions.

The National Standard for Hospital Libraries (NSHL) has been developed based on the results of two studies entitled "Standards for Hospital Libraries in Tehran" (8) and "National Standards for Iranian Hospital Libraries" (9). Research project of National Standards of the Iranian Hospital Libraries was ordered by Scientific Publications and Information Development Center, Deputy for Research and Technology of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in 2019 under the supervision of Medical Information and Scientific Resources Management of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences. The project was carried out in collaboration with the medical sciences universities of Tehran, Iran, Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Mashhad, Uremia, and Babol, and with the participation of the directors of central libraries in these universities and selected librarians working in hospitals. In this study, the indicators and criteria in the standards for hospital libraries in Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Ireland, the American Medical Libraries Association (MLA), the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the standard for hospital libraries in Tehran, and the standard for Iranian academic libraries were considered. By holding meeting of the standard's technical commission in the fall, 2020, the final version of the standard was approved.

Conclusion

Therefore, the NSHL was developed with the ultimate goal of providing a practical model for the establishment and development of hospital libraries and providing and improving library services and medical information to users and stakeholders. The NSHL covers all aspects of hospital libraries, including mission and organization, strategic planning, resources management, and service management, and applies to all public and private hospital libraries.

Declarations

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Scientific Publications and Information Development Center, the Deputy Minister for Research and Technology of the Health Ministry for the financial support and their



ongoing cooperation, as well as the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Technology of SBMU for awarding a research grant (17787-50348-98/09/25), and partner universities, technical commissions, and specialized working groups in all process of this project.

Conflicts of Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Ethical statement

The authors have observed all the ethical issues in writing

and publishing.

Funding and support

This project has been carried out with the financial support of the Deputy Minister for Research and Technology of the Health Ministry and the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Technology of SBMU.

Authors' contributions

All author contributed in designing, running, and writing all parts of this project.

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