

Role of the Librarian in Today's Health Care Setting - The Clinical Medical Librarian

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Abstract

In today's health care setting, medical professionals need to update, find evidence and fill the gaps in the existing knowledge with material from the ever-growing body of research literature. Paucity of time and lack of skills required for literature search makes this task difficult. The clinical librarian, medical librarian, clinical information specialist/scientist, and medical information specialist/scientist are terms used for librarians who assist in this task and search literature as a direct service. This could enhance improve care decisions and help in the practice of Evidence Based Medicine.

Keywords: Lifelong learner; Evidence based medicine; Clinical medical librarian.

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Introduction

The Medical Council of India has proposed the Curriculum-based Medical Education (CBME) from 2019. The undergraduate medical education program proposed by MCI is designed to create an "Indian Medical Graduate" (IMG) possessing requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and responsiveness, such that she or he may function appropriately and effectively as a physician.¹

In order to achieve this, precise goals for the Learner have been formulated. These learner's goals include commitment to continuous improvement of skills and knowledge as a Clinician who is also Lifelong Learner, able to work in a health care Team, and who is committed to achieving Professional excellence.¹

The competencies pertaining to Lifelong Learning include the ability to search (including

through electronic means), and critically reevaluate the medical literature and apply the newly gained knowledge and information in the care of the patient.¹

Medical knowledge grows every day, so that previously accepted facts rapidly become outdated and at times it may seem impossible to follow such explosion of scientific information. The medical professionals need to update, find evidence and fill the gaps in the existing knowledge with material from the ever-growing body of research literature. The term Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) was coined to include the conscientious, explicit, judicious and reasonable use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients.²

Modern therapeutic modalities involve teams comprising of members from interprofessional backgrounds. Interprofessional Care (IPC) could be defined as "the provision of comprehensive health

services to patients by multiple caregivers who work collaboratively to deliver quality care within and across healthcare settings".³ Healthcare delivery is a complex process involving stakeholders from different professions. Most developed nations are currently moving towards an interprofessional approach for patient care.

Interprofessional collaboration occurs when two or more professionals work together to achieve common goals and this teamwork is a means for solving a variety of problems and complex issues. The benefits of this type of collaboration allow participants to achieve more together as a team than what they can individually, serve larger groups of people, and grow both on individual and organizational levels. Interprofessional collaboration is currently seen in many areas including clinical practice, education, and research.⁴

To prepare future medical professionals for work in a clinical setting that increasingly features IPC, medical training needs to focus on the importance of teamwork, and the working of healthcare teams. Thus, it is important to understand the unique roles of various health professionals involved in patient care.

What is the role of Librarians in the current Health Care Setting? - The concept of Clinical Medical Librarian.

A typical medical professional is expected to be available round the clock for patient care, and in a country like ours where the doctor patient ratio is often dismal, these professional have scarcely any time to dedicate for literature search. Therefore a great effort is needed to establish the critical link between the huge body of information hidden away in the medical literature and the information needed at the point of care.⁵ Librarians, skilled in identifying appropriate resources and working with multiple complex interfaces, can support the clinicians and help them to practice EBM by understanding the clinical question and providing time and expertise in identifying the best evidence.⁶

It is also believed that evidence-based medical practice generates cost savings due to the delivery of more effective care⁵ by reducing the lengths of stay, number of tests, etc. It can eliminate the need for unnecessary treatment while preventing rampant malpractice litigation.⁷

Clinical Medical Librarian (CML) services [sometimes called just "Clinical Librarian (CL)" services] were originally conceived as a way to integrate health sciences library services and

the literature searching expertise of medical librarians into the patient care setting.^{8,9} Gertrude Lamb established the first CML programme at the University of Missouri- Kansas City School of Medicine in 1971.⁵ The term clinical librarian, medical librarian, clinical information specialist/scientist, and medical information specialist/scientist are all considered synonyms for librarians providing literature searching as a direct service.¹⁰

These 'information professionals' join the multidisciplinary team at ward rounds and in clinical meetings and work in partnership with medical professionals, promoting a questioning and learning culture within the health care team and in the organisation.

A primary goal of these services has been to overcome the time and expertise barriers that clinicians face when they attempt to incorporate the best current evidence from the literature into their patient care decisions. An important secondary goal has been to enhance the educational experience of students and residents during their training.⁸

Searching medical literature helps to optimise patient care. Librarian participation in ward rounds supports evidence-based medicine (EBM) practice in the clinical environment working in tandem with clinicians. The clinical team members should recognise the value added to the clinical expertise by having the librarian present.^{6,9} The CML should be accepted as a member of the clinical health care team as the CML-provided information resources could improve team members' knowledge of the clinical literature, and thus develop the overall quality and value of the CML services.⁸

The clinical librarian service takes the library service to the user and provides responses to questions regarding patient care. Medical professionals may face difficulty in searching the literature systematically when faced with a clinical question, because of time constraints and lack of awareness of the resources available. The clinical librarian fills this gap. By attending ward rounds, journal clubs, clinical and audit meetings, the clinical librarian ensures that these questions are answered using the best available evidence-based resources.^{7,10}

We have noticed that the literature is flooded with numerous substandard and fake articles confounding medical facts. This is especially true with emerging health issues and infections, the COVID-19 pandemic which has shaken the world, is a very good example. Every day, numerous articles are in circulation and the veracity of many

of these sources are questionable. The librarian could help in identifying the authenticity of these resources.

A CML can be most effective by participating in rounds involving patients with more complex medical problems (severe diseases and many differential diagnoses). Understanding of the uniqueness of each patient and complexity of the medical problems along with the clinical setting plays a role.¹¹

Teaching computerized searching and bibliographic skills can make it possible for librarians to expand the existing programmes and enhance the role of the CML by adding a variety of educational experiences to CML services and creating a more worthwhile relationship with the clinical staff.⁵ The librarian can use opportunities during rounds to teach use of controlled vocabulary, keyword searching, resources, and supports critical appraisal of articles.^{6,9} The introduction of very user-friendly search engines and freely accessible databases on the Web has shifted the emphasis of many CML services from facilitating and mediating access to information to educating health care team members about the strategies needed to effectively use these resources on their own.⁸

The Librarian is the chief educator of those who use the library and should make it a centre of self-education. Libraries should play an important part in the process of self-education by the medical student and teach them to make effective use of the library.¹² The librarians can teach search skills either through workshops or through the development of online modules.¹⁰

Although information literacy is an essential skill for both residents and trainees, it has been found that their progress through the educational stages did not increase the sophistication of digital literacy, thus, identifying the need for instruction and training in the area of information science.¹⁰

Besides helping physicians provide quality care to patients, they help could provide information suitable for patients, answer consumer questions, and provide information to the health care industry.¹¹ It has been found that clinical librarianship is however not much developed in India. The recognition of clinical librarian or an evidence-based librarian will have an effect on current hospital practice.⁷

The benefits associated with a CML services are effects on patient care and appear indirect. The scope for the development of CML services

is vast, but will inevitably be limited by financial, organisational and cultural constraints. The challenge for librarians, clinicians, and managers is to demonstrate the value of such services in terms of clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, and, in doing so, to expand the evidence base for this practice.⁹

Considering their usefulness, there are certain factors to be considered while advocating the services of CML including the clinical settings in which the CMLs can work most effectively, situations where CML-medical professional interactions are most helpful, productive, and conducive to better patient outcomes, the changing health care landscape, effective work schedule for the CMLs, optimal ratio of CMLs to medical professionals served, and training or skill sets needed to make CMLs most effective.⁸

Conclusion

The success of the CML depends on the utilisation of the literature in patient care. They serve as a bridge between the available medical information resources and the medical communality. Their services could serve as an aid to the busy clinical Faculty in day to day treatment and also assist in research.

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