Editorial

Health information professionals: delivering core services and value in extraordinary times

Abstract

The 2020 virtual issue of the Health Information and Libraries Journal (HILJ) is published to link to the CILIP Health Libraries Group Conference which was to take place in Scotland 22–25th July. Whilst the conference was postponed in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, its themes of (i) Working in Partnership; (ii) Resilience and Well-being; (iii) Public and Patient involvement; (iv) Quality Impact and Metrics; and (v) Improvement and Innovation have nevertheless provided the basis on which to compile this virtual issue. Overarching these themes is a core value of the HIL profession, to provide relevant, timely and sustainable information services, and the articles selected from HILJ (2018 through to March 2020) contribute to the aim of meeting and going beyond these goals under the conference banner of ‘not your average day in the office’. The virtual issue mirrors the format of a regular issue of HILJ, a review article, four original articles and three from our regular features: ‘Dissertations into Practice’, ‘International Perspectives and Initiatives’ and ‘Teaching and Learning in Action’. The authors come from Canada, China, Croatia, Sweden and the UK. All articles included in this issue are available online.

The 2020 virtual issue of the Health Information and Libraries Journal (HILJ) has been compiled to link to the annual Health Libraries Group (HLG) Conference, which was originally scheduled to take place in Scotland on 22–25th July 2020. In light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the conference was advised to postpone. Indeed by the time we go to press, many events from across the world will have taken similar measures to reduce risks to participants’ health, associated with travel and large gatherings, and to manage the pandemic. During this time of social distancing, reducing physical contact and communication, the virtual and networked world steps up, and accordingly, we saw the virtual issue of HILJ as an opportunity for the HIL community to demonstrate resilience and to continue to disseminate information even in the most extraordinary and unprecedented times.

The banner of the conference is ‘Not your average day in the office’, and planning is underway to structure the conference around the following associated themes:

- Working in Partnership,
- Resilience and Well-being,
- Public and Patient Involvement,
- Quality Impact and Metrics,
- Improvement and Innovation.

These have been used to compile this virtual issue and together give emphasis to a profession that has at its foundation the core values of access, intellectual freedom, lifelong learning, service and sustainability, among others. As we move into new environments for digital information and associated opportunities and challenges for the library service, it is perhaps timely to be reminded that these core values were succinctly expressed by S R Ranganathan, back in 1932, by the first of his principles, that ‘Books are for use’. This was to stress that operating a modern library service should be for use, rather than for storage and preservation only. For the HIL profession in 2020, getting the right information to the right people, efficiently and effectively, remains the core value and the above themes provide current and vital foci for maintaining and developing services, today and well into the future. The virtual issue contains published articles, which align to these core themes, selected from HILJ from the March 2018 issue through to March 2020. The authors come from Canada, China, Croatia, Sweden and the UK. The virtual issue follows the usual format.
of the journal and consists of an editorial, a review article, four original articles and three articles from the regular feature columns (Teaching and Learning in Action, Dissertations into Practice and International Perspectives and Initiatives). All articles included in this virtual issue are re-published and available in a free-to-access online issue on http://wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/hilj.

Frances Johnson
Email: F.Johnson@mmu.ac.uk
Manchester Metropolitan University

In this issue . . .

The HLG Conference themes each relate to key aspects of the daily working practices and priorities of library and information workers, and to the current work environment that impacts on the delivery of the core services of health libraries. At a time when reliable evidence and information are demanded by the professionals we work alongside, and are expected by patients and the public, health care librarians have a prominent role to play in delivering information services, based on critical appraisal and on a fundamental understanding of people’s information needs and behaviour. Further improved and transformed by innovation, impact assessment and metrics are required to examine how well the profession meets its core values.

Working in partnership

Collaboration across professional groups, working in partnership is abound. Delivering on the responsibilities of the health care librarian is based on understanding health information needs and information seeking behaviour. Librarians and Health Professionals can work together in meeting information needs, providing information services, facilitating knowledge dissemination and transfer and in supporting digital and health literacy. The three papers in this issue address this theme, ‘Working in Partnership’ in different ways where collaboration and teamwork in seeking and sharing information in the workplace appear common.

In the Dissertations into Practice feature, Butler describes a survey to gather the views of both health librarians and professionals on health literacy, with the specific aim to identify how libraries and health services can collaborate in this endeavour. The respondents overall agreed that the key to successful health literacy is through all professionals focusing on effective and targeted education and support. The survey highlighted a particular positive outcome, towards this goal, through working in partnership and that was in signposting information.

The second article from Alving, Christensen & Thrysøe provides a literature review exploring the information search behaviours of hospital nurses. Drawing on studies from Canada, the United States of America, Nigeria and Taiwan, they indicate that a lack of time, skills or available training resulted in nurses undertaking Google searches or consulting colleagues to meet their information needs. Such a preference for seemingly short cuts to information highlights the value of the training and education provided by health care librarians.

Sbafi, Collins & Weist evaluated the impact of such educational intervention provided by student champions in the use of Evidence Search from the National Institute of Clinical Evidence (NICE). In this scheme student, ‘champions’ are trained by librarians at NICE to roll out the training sessions to their peers back at their universities. Drawing on data collected over a five-year period, they report that undergraduate students were more consistent and critical in using evidence-based information sources following training and developed what is described as confidence and ‘discerning search skills’.

Resilience and well-being/public and patient involvement

The topics of resilience and well-being, and public and patient involvement are explored in two further articles demonstrating the ways in which health librarians can ensure that effective knowledge dissemination and reliable resources are provided to health professionals working towards better health outcomes, and to the public and patients concerned for their well-being.

Turning attention to peoples’ independent and continuous health information seeking and sharing behaviour, Stanarevic focuses on the specific
challenges faced by patients in finding health information on three different rare diseases. Using semi-structured interviews, the findings stress the importance people attributed to the need to confirm that their symptoms were ‘normal’ and to getting realistic insight into the condition following diagnosis. It is suggested that connecting with other patients may be the best way to meet these needs.

Chen, Zhang, Feng, & Liu demonstrate how health librarians can evaluate changes in fulfilling the online health information needs of patients through analysis of social media, and in this paper, the posts in online health communities. For this, they propose the knowledge representation framework (of knowledge support rate and effective information rate) and conclude that online health communities can effectively meet the information needs of patients by utilising authoritative domain knowledge in the medical field.

Improvement & innovation/quality impact & metrics

The articles in this issue focus on improvements to professional practice. Identifying the value of health care librarians and services is ongoing and part of working practices.

In Sweden, Haglund, Roos & Wallgren-Bjor identify four key areas for innovation in meeting the demands of organisations and users: coping with open science/open access initiatives; supporting researchers doing systematic reviews; understanding user experiences in Swedish health science libraries; and the expansion into recruitment and continuing professional development. Of particular interest is their assessment of the impact on changing roles and suggest that there is a shift from the generalist towards the expert role, and question how best to prepare those new to the profession to the changing environment of health libraries.

Focusing on a specific area of search and retrieval and on which the librarian can improve search outcomes, Golder, Wright & Loke develop and evaluate advanced expert search with search filters. Drawing on 19 surgical intervention reviews, data sets were generated for developing, testing and validating a search filter for MEDLINE and EMBASE on ‘adverse effects of surgical interventions’. Their findings indicate the benefit of the filter with a generic search strategy could retrieve up to 90% relative recall, a result which could be improved with the addition of search terms for specific adverse effects.

The final paper comes from the Teaching and Learning feature in the issue and partly addresses how we judge the value of a health library and its services, and specifically via the accreditation of the core skills and competencies of the profession. George & Rowland suggest that health librarians who teach in or support higher education (HE) students in the UK can and should gain accreditation and recognition by the route of HEA Fellowship. The paper examines the synergies between the UK Professional Standards Framework (or UKPSF) for Fellowship and the criteria for CILIP Chartership (the Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB)) to outline how such recognition could be attained. The exercise serves to highlight the role of the librarian in teaching and education, and suggests the potential for such recognition and accreditation.

These articles have been bought together in this virtual issue to complement the conference themes and to contribute to the developments in health librarianship and information services where by positive action ‘No day is an ordinary day in the office’.