

Access to Information and Information Practices in Clinic Libraries in Bucharest

Dr. Octavia-Luciana Madge

Associate Professor, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters, Department of Information and Documentation Sciences, Romania, octavialuciana@yahoo.com

Abstract: In the context of new information and communication technologies and of the development of large electronic collections, access to medical information and the information practices of doctors have experienced a continuous evolution. Starting from results of previous research carried out by the author, which analysed the access to electronic information resources by the users of academic medical libraries in Romania and showed that a small number of library users surveyed prefer electronic information resources, this paper presents the results of a pilot study from a research whose purpose is to investigate the usage of medical information resources and the information practices of users in university clinic libraries in Bucharest through a questionnaire-based survey. The study found that the users from the clinics employ other information practices and a higher preference and usage of electronic resources. The results also underline the need for an increase of user training in accessing electronic information resources.

Keywords: access to information, electronic resources, information practices, information users, doctors, university clinic libraries, Bucharest

1. Introduction

Medical information can be accessed in Romania in the central libraries of the Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy, which in most cases also have branches in hospitals, within different university clinics and departments. These libraries are undergoing different development stages, some of them still being a little behind compared to similar institutions in the Western countries.

Academic medical libraries in Romania have been approached lately in a series of studies especially with regards to the possibility of increased access to electronic resources and the way in which they succeed in meeting the information needs of users. The modernization of information services provided by academic medical libraries in Romania has taken place gradually during the last two decades. In this context, we considered it necessary to investigate the way in which the changes implemented in medical libraries support the

information and research needs of users, and analyse the patterns of usage of document collections in such libraries.

Until this point, these studies were mainly focused on the central libraries and their users and not on the branches – the university clinic libraries which most often are represented by simple book collections in a room from different clinics, without a qualified librarian.

2. Access to information in university clinic libraries in Bucharest

Starting from the results of previous research (Porumbeanu, 2009) on users of academic medical libraries in Romania, which indicated a limited use of electronic information resources, and from our suppositions that the users from the branches of such libraries, namely those from the clinics, exhibit an increased interest and a more frequent use of electronic resources, the author designed and conducted research among users (doctors) working in university clinics in Bucharest. The Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest provides access to electronic resources in its branches that are run within different university clinics and departments. The doctors use them in their training, in various research projects in which they are involved, in the preparation of PhD theses and in all situations when they need to access diverse and complex information resources. This study was undertaken in order to investigate the measure in which electronic resources are used in clinics, the need for user training and the information practices displayed by doctors.

One must specify that unlike the situation in other countries (Harrison et al, 2010), Romanian hospitals are not staffed with clinical librarians who could provide support in the context of evidence-based medicine for the clinical and research activity through their abilities of accessing and processing biomedical information. Unfortunately, academic medical libraries have not even established a future strategy to cover this area with information professionals.

3. Context of the research

The research aims to analyse patterns of information resource usage by the doctors in university clinic libraries in Bucharest so as to help increase the access of Romanian medical practitioners to information, and a pilot study was conducted in this regard. The study was designed in the spring of 2011 when data about the library and its branches were obtained from the then-current managers of the Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest, who approved and facilitated the conduction of this research. The research has two main goals and one of them constitutes the object of this article, namely to identify the information practices of the users from the branch libraries (type of resources consulted, frequency of use of the library and of its documents), and to assess the need for user training on the use of electronic information resources.

The survey sample

In this pilot study we focused on three branches of the Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest, namely the branches from the Cardiology Clinic III of the Fundeni Clinical Institute, the General Surgery Clinic of the Colentina Clinical Hospital and the Infectious Diseases Adults Clinic III of the “Prof. dr. Matei Balș” National Institute for Infectious Diseases.

4. Methods of data collection

A questionnaire was developed based on previous questionnaires that had been used by the author to carry out user studies. It consisted of 28 questions, but only some of them are subject herein. The questionnaire was distributed to the doctors from the three university clinics – residents, attending physicians, consultants. The number of doctors in a clinic is not a fixed one throughout the year, but varies depending on the number of residents, for example. Unlike the previous studies, there was a lower reply rate, 60%, which can be explained through the lack of time of medical practitioners.

5. Key study findings and the interpretation thereof

Most of those who answered the questionnaire are residents 71%. We had answers 21% from attending physicians, and 8% from consultants. Some of the participants have a PhD in Medical Sciences, some are PhD candidates in Medical Sciences and some are part of the teaching staff.

A first part of the questionnaire included questions about the usage of the Central Library collections and services.

With reference to the frequency of usage of the Central Library, 46% participants answered that they use the Central Library, 38% saying they access the library 1-3 times per year, and 8% access it on a monthly basis.

Despite the users being involved in more research activities, the results of this study show that there are no significant differences in comparison to student users regarding the use of hard copy / electronic resources provided by the library at its headquarters. 21% answered they access the Central Library to consult hard copy documents, 4% to consult electronic resources and 21% to consult both types of resources.

Asked what *medical* information resources they consult most frequently at the library, 38% participants in the study indicated hard copy documents, with 25% indicating electronic resources.

Regarding the librarian’s assistance, 46% participants answered they need it more for identifying hard copy documents and 13% participants for accessing electronic information resources. This indicates that users also need more training in using traditional library resources.

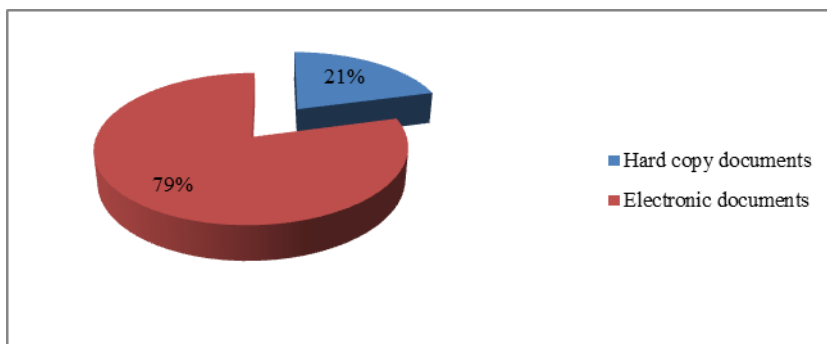
The next group of questions was about the clinic library.

The answers show a much higher percentage of usage of the library and its resources. There is an obvious reason for this, the lack of time of practitioners for accessing the Central Library and the advantages provided by the branch library located at their workplace and whose resources can be consulted at the very moment when the users need it. 46% of participants answered positively, with 29% using the branch library weekly, 17% participants 1-3 times per year, 8% monthly and 4% daily.

In the case of the clinic library, there is an equal percentage of use of hard copy and electronic documents, namely 21%, and 17% use both types of documents. These are surprising results whose reasons are not yet very clear; taking into account that one would have expected a much higher percentage for the use of electronic resources for these users.

Asked what *medical* information resources they consult most frequently at the clinic library, 29% of users answered electronic documents and 33% indicated hard copy documents, but when asked clearly about their preference for one type of resources, unlike the previous research, in the case of the doctor users, 79% of participants declared their clear preference for electronic information resources, with only 21% preferring hard copy resources. 17% participants specified they would be interested in using electronic information resources but that they are unfamiliar with them. This indicates that the real reasons for the low use of electronic resources, revealed by previous research in the case of Romanian users, are not about user preference but more about the knowledge of such resources and of their advantages, their availability and the users' lack of training in accessing them. The participants in this pilot study prefer electronic resources, but the obstacles occurred are connected to other factors, as we will also see hereafter.

Figure 1. User preference for information resources



Asked to specify the reasons for which they *prefer* hard copy or electronic information resources, the participants in this study provided the following answers:

- those who *prefer* hard copy information resources indicated that it is easier to access them and that they are more convenient to use;
- those who *prefer* electronic information resources indicated: quick and easy access to information, quantity and quality of information, new information, diversity of information, easy information storage and time saving.

Asked to specify the reasons for which they *don't prefer* hard copy or electronic information resources, the participants in this study provided the following answers:

- those who *don't prefer* hard copy information resources indicated: difficult and limited access, limited coverage, difficult to carry if required, obsolete information and time consuming;
- those who *don't prefer* electronic information resources indicated: difficult to read on the computer screen, the eyes get tired after using them.

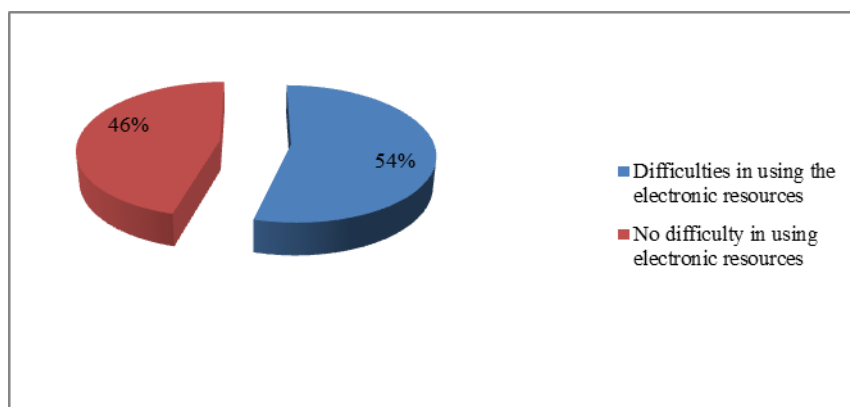
The users are obviously aware of the advantages of the electronic resources which surpass those of paper documents.

46% of participants declared they would be interested in being provided access to electronic information resources at home or at other places. One must mention that even at the time when this study started, in 2011, mobile access for users in the clinics to the electronic resources provided by the library such as ProQuest, EMBASE, Ovid, ScienceDirect, etc. was possible, but the results show that the users were unaware of this fact and the library didn't do much to inform them about the possibility of mobile access to electronic resources.

In the case of such users, another problem, as we will see hereafter, is that they can't really identify these information resources.

54% of participants stated they face difficulties in using the electronic information resources, and only 46% provided a negative response.

Figure 2. User difficulties of using electronic information resources



Unlike the student users who indicated difficulties of a technical nature, the users from the clinics mentioned: the price, limited access, especially to new information, lack of a complete access and the large number of articles on the subject / excess information.

These user remarks indicate the fact that they were unaware that the electronic resources provided by the library are free, which, in fact, shows they failed to use these resources. Also, the last remark indicates that there is a real need for specialized assistance from the librarian who could help the user in the process of filtering and selecting the information. One participant even suggested that there should be a person to guide every doctor according to his/her information needs. The responses to questions about the role of librarians in supporting the clinical and research activity of doctors, which were analysed in another article, revealed that "(...) most participants are aware of the importance and the advantages which could stem from the presence of a medical librarian in the clinical team." (Madge, 2015: 44)

Asked to specify the electronic information resources they consult most frequently, the participants in this study answered as follows: PubMed, JASE, EJE, Medline, EMJ, Circulation, NEJM, ScienceDirect, OVID, MedScape, and, in general, journals and databases in their specialty. With regards to our small study, most participants are specialized in cardiology and internal medicine.

Due to the percentage of users that consult the electronic resources provided by the library and in order to find ways of increasing the use thereof, the author considered it very important to know the manner in which the participants in the study found out about medical electronic information resources, as well as the sources for such information resources. The answers are as follows: colleagues, Internet (by searching), hard copy books, hard copy journals, hospital, and conferences. The answers once again indicate that the library does not pay much attention to the promotion of these resources among users.

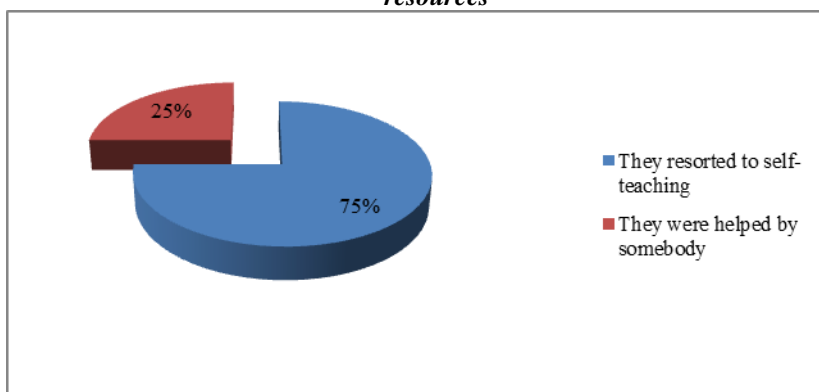
50% of participants consider that the range of electronic information resources provided by the library should be enriched. Their suggestions include: Science Direct, UpToDate, Ovid, Springer. Once again, we must note that the participants' answers clearly show they were unaware of the resources provided by the library and this is certainly a low point for the library in terms of failing to inform the users of the entire range of resources and services provided.

One must mention that currently academic medical libraries in Romania and consequently their users benefit from the participation of their institutions in a consortium, *Anelis Plus* (Association of the Universities, Research and Development Institutes, and Central University Libraries in Romania / Asociația Universităților, a Institutelor de Cercetare - Dezvoltare și a Bibliotecilor Centrale Universitare din România). One of the main objectives of this national project is to provide electronic access to scientific literature through

subscriptions at national level to the main full text packages (ScienceDirect, Springer, Wiley Interscience, Proquest, EBSCO Host, etc.).

Concerning the way the users learned to consult electronic information resources, 75% declared they resorted to self-teaching and 25% said they had been helped by somebody, but this was not a librarian.

Figure 3. The way the users learned to consult electronic information resources



The majority (92%) didn't participate in any training session organized by the library about the use of electronic resources and we believe this to be the main reason for which users are unaware with regards to these resources and the manner of using the same. The Central Library organizes such training sessions on a regular basis, but the sessions are held at its headquarters. If the library were to organize at least one training session per year in every clinic where there is a branch library, the percentage of usage would certainly increase and users would be more familiar with these information resources.

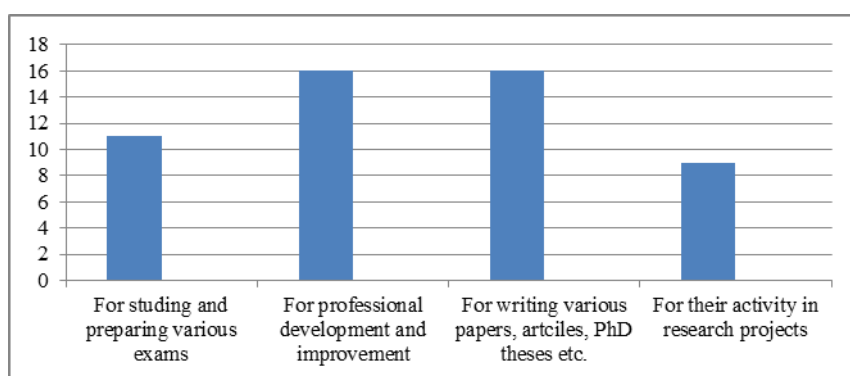
Asked if they believe librarians should organize training sessions regarding the searching of databases, information retrieval, PubMed, MeSH, 54% of participants indicated an optional class during the undergraduate programme as the best solution, while 25% suggested regular training sessions within the clinic library. 13% of users provided a negative response. This strengthens the author's opinion and proposal from 2012 that the higher education institutions in Romania should find solutions to include information literacy classes within the curriculum of all specializations and levels of education. Such a solution would certainly contribute to a better preparation of future graduates of all levels for living and working in a digital world. This solution has already been implemented in many universities abroad and with very good results. (Pasleau et al, 2007; Schallier, 2007)

The participants' suggestions for the increase of electronic information resource usage among the library users included: free access to the library resources for

the teaching staff, more computers, a list with the five most important databases, more information and training on the electronic resources. These are clear indications of the fact that the participants don't know much about the library offer of electronic resources and the conditions for their provision to the user community and also of the participants' need for specialized guidance in accessing, selecting and using the electronic information resources.

Asked about the reasons for which they need the information acquired from the library, they answered as follows: for studying and preparing various exams (46%), for professional development and improvement (67%), for writing various papers, articles, PhD theses etc. (67%), for keeping up to date with the latest news in the field (67%) and for their activity in research projects (38%).

Figure 4. Reasons for clinic library usage



The results show that the needs of this category of users, the doctors in the clinics where there are branch libraries are related to their current medical activity, which implies continuous improvement of their medical knowledge and also for the research component of their work, which, in turn, involves preparing papers for conferences and writing articles.

6. Conclusions

Despite the fact that they cannot be generalized, the results of this pilot study conducted among users from three university clinic libraries reflect the situation in most university clinic libraries in Bucharest and show that the medical users from the clinics prove a higher preference and usage of electronic resources. A major issue in the case of the library subject in the study, which coordinates all these clinic libraries, not only at the moment when this study was conducted, but even at present times, is the lack of user training sessions in its branches. The obstacles met by users refer to a lack of information on the electronic resources to which they can have access through the library and the lack of necessary skills to access, select and use them at their full potential. The users are aware of the advantages of electronic resources, however they need specialized guidance

in accessing, selecting and using the medical information needed in their current clinic activity and in their research activity.

There is a clear need for an increase in user training, the best solution in the author's opinion being the integration of a compulsory course on information literacy in the curriculum for all education levels. By the time this course can be organized, at least one training session per year in every branch library would help increase the percentage of usage of electronic resources, thus users would be more familiar with these information resources and could gain substantial benefits from the wide range of electronic information resources at their disposal.

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