Abstract
This is the 8th in a series of articles exploring international trends in health science librarianship with a focus on the UK and Ireland in the first decade of the 21st century. The invited authors are from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Future issues will track trends from Scotland and Wales.

Keywords: case studies; comparative study; librarianship; health science; library and information professionals; national strategies; Northern Ireland; Southern Ireland (Eire); United Kingdom (UK)

Introduction
The library and information service available to health and social care (HSC) employees in Northern Ireland is delivered by the Queen’s University Medical and HSC Library under contract to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). The hybrid service is provided electronically via the honni (health on the net Northern Ireland) website and through a network of physical libraries including the Medical and Biomedical Libraries at Queen’s University and four major libraries in the Northern, Southern and Western Trusts and one in the HSC Library, Knockbracken as well as a range of smaller outlier libraries in a number of hospitals and social service training units (SSTUs) throughout Northern Ireland.

The major trends identified in discussion with colleagues throughout the service relate to the specific situation in Northern Ireland and the way the contract has developed; these trends relate closely to those identified in recent national and international surveys. They include centralisation of services, physically in the Medical Library and electronically through improved services via honni; procurement, in particular, the shift from print to electronic resources; changing ways of delivering training; and marketing. Underpinning all these trends are developments in technology that are changing the way we deliver both resources and services.

Centralisation of services
In Northern Ireland, we have now experienced five successive years of budget reduction either through actual cuts or because we received no inflationary uplift at a time of rising resource costs. The impact of the declining budget affects staffing, resources and service development. In response to this, and facilitated by the increase in electronic resources and services, a review of outlier libraries has been carried out and the numerous small libraries with minimal staffing are gradually being replaced by honni hubs. These are centrally located dedicated PCs with online and printed guides where all staff can access the honni website to carry out information searches, request material not available in full text, propose purchases and request help. There is also a growing acknowledgement of the need to deliver services via a plethora of mobile devices and we are working towards that. All print material is centralised in the Medical and HSC Libraries and is available for loan.

Procurement
Centralisation would not be possible without the increasing procurement of e-resources, and in common with all other countries and regions, this was identified as a major trend. The move from print
to electronic resources, particularly journals, is well established for the service to university staff and students, but this has been slower for the HSC sector because of the cost and IT access issues. There is also a clear and growing trend towards the purchase of e-books but as many are available on a credit-only basis and therefore only accessible for a limited time, additional credits have to be purchased at considerable cost.

Cost issues are being tackled through the streamlining of the purchasing process and initial steps towards regional procurement. All requests are checked against honni, and if items are not already available, they are then considered for regional procurement. The increasing need for a point-of-care tool and the cost of these have been an added incentive towards shared purchase across all Trusts, but this is very challenging to achieve and is still in progress. IT issues mainly revolve around firewalls and security, but the establishment of an active and co-operative IT Committee with representatives from all Trusts has gone a long way to resolving these problems.

Training

A further trend has been developments in the way training is delivered. There has been a noticeable move away from federated search systems towards web-service-based resource discovery tools that offer improved integration, indexing and ease of searching. Consequently, we have moved away from traditional literature search sessions and concentrate on empowering users by stressing the value of information skills and knowing how to evaluate good-quality data to make informed evidence-based decisions. Increased pressure on the time available for staff to attend training sessions has led to us looking at video conferencing and online training. A pilot using Lync technology to explore how users can interact with the team of subject librarians based in the Medical and HSC Library from anywhere in the region is in hand.

Marketing

The need to be proactive and market services are increasingly important. A marketing strategy and annual activity plans direct our ever-increasing work in raising the profile of the library service. We make widespread use of social networking services to engage our users and have established a presence on all Trust intranets. Having worked so hard to provide our users with seamless access to resources, we are now in danger of becoming invisible so we are continually reminding them of the value of libraries and highly skilled information professionals in the digital world through a variety of marketing techniques.

Other trends

Another trend noted was an increase in open access material although the impact of that on the health service users is still a little way off unless there is significant funding particularly for the gold route. Also, the move from the collection-based design of library spaces to more user-focused design is noticeable with users looking for well-equipped, well-managed spaces with a range of reader places, a plethora of power points and wireless connectivity.

References


Trends in Irish health science librarianship over the last 10 years

In the Republic of Ireland, health policy is the responsibility of the Department of Health, whilst health services are managed by the Health Service Executive (HSE). The HSE employs 100 000 people, 40.73% of whom are full-time equivalent library staff. Libraries are largely hospital-based, part of the university sector or work in statutory agencies, charitable institutions and research agencies. Compared with international counterparts, the health science library profession in Ireland is relatively new. Although librarians were employed in nursing and medical faculties of universities, the health service only began to employ librarians in the 1990s triggered by a report commissioned by the Library Association of Ireland.

Much has been achieved in this short time, and some milestones are highlighted in this article. The profession is influenced by international developments in finance and technology, as well as social and cultural changes in how people engage with information. However, national events have had the biggest impact on health librarianship, viz. the end of the boom period of the ‘Celtic tiger’, the endless restructuring of health services and the paucity of jobs for librarians in the health system.

Milestones in Irish health science librarianship

Setting standards for the profession

The Health Science Libraries Group (HSLG) is a section of the Library Association of Ireland and represents all health science librarians and libraries in Ireland. It has a strong national professional voice and provides a cohesive structure to the profession. Although a voluntary group, it has grown in strength since its inception in 1982 and plays a key role in continuing professional development, culminating in the hosting of the EAHIL conference in Dublin in 2009. Standards for health science libraries were first published in 1993 and updated by the HSLG in 2004. Given concerns about the profession, the HSLG commissioned research into the status of health science libraries and librarians in 2010 which resulted in the publication of the SHeLLI report in 2011.

Sharing resources via consortia

Consortia have proved a successful model for sharing resources in various areas:

- A national document supply co-operative between Irish health care libraries was set up in 1991, and since 2012, it incorporates electronic journal holdings.
- A consortia of intellectual disabilities libraries in Ireland was established in 2003 (available at http://www.idaal.com/).
- A consortia of all HSE libraries (hslibrary.i.e) won an award for best e-government health website in 2006.

Despite these initiatives, there is still little integration of consortia between the health and academic sectors in Ireland, but it is hoped that this may develop in the future.

Initiatives in open access and research

Several initiatives in the area of open access publishing have developed in the health library sector including:

- Lenus the Irish Health Repository launched in 2009 which makes the research output of the HSE and over 130 health agencies available free online.
- RCSI epubs repository and the National Documentation Centre on Drug Use repository.
- Irish universities operate institutional repositories capturing medical, nursing and allied health research by university staff.

• A new open access journal OALIS (Open Access Library & Information Studies) was launched this year that should enhance the evidence base of the profession, not least in health librarianship. In terms of research, Irish librarians have been co-authors on systematic reviews, notably on an area in health where Ireland was a forerunner in Europe – the smoking ban. Although few in number, Irish health librarians are increasing their research profile by publishing in LIS and medical, scientific and nursing journals.

Changing roles

The SHeLLI report outlined new roles for health librarians including that of ‘clinical librarian’ for hospital-based librarians and ‘corporate librarian’ for organisations with business intelligence needs. Information specialists and embedded librarians work in the Irish health system, independently of any physical library. A role that does not currently exist in Ireland is ‘consumer health librarian’ that could be developed with proper resourcing. The challenge for librarians will be to keep up with a changing environment and update their skills set accordingly.

Rethinking the use of physical space

Libraries as physical places are changing as predicted by Lindberg & Humphreys and Ludwig & Starr; some, such as for example Beaumont Hospital and the Mercer Library, have completely reinvented their premises into modern spaces for study, work and group collaboration. Here, the ‘focus has been on people rather than on collections’. Some health care libraries have closed and librarian posts have been lost. Hospital libraries in particular will radically change in the next decade. However, for now teaching hospitals still require ‘access to appropriate learning resources and facilities including libraries’ as part of their accreditation. Advocacy for the profession will be a key driver for growth and the development of health librarians; in the meantime, integration into clinical teams in line with national strategies will be core to raising the profile and visibility of librarians in the health sector.

Conclusion

Doran’s conclusions in 2002 about health science librarianship are still valid today – Ireland still lacks a National eLibrary for all health professionals; funding for health libraries is scarce; the Department of Health Library has not been reestablished; posts in health libraries are not being filled with very few new jobs advertised; there has been no advancement on pay and career opportunities in the health services for librarians. The biggest achievements derive from the ethics and values that bind librarians together, viz.: co-operation, collaboration, peer-support, mentoring and sharing best practice. This is apparent from the messages of encouragement, support and appreciation on the HSLG discussion list and participation of the profession at conferences. The SHeLLI report outlined the challenges for the future of the profession that include promotion, building an evidence base and staff and service development. The HSLG SHeLLI working group is actively working on the implementation of recommendations. The profession is evolving with prominence given to the librarian in context over the library and more emphasis being placed on research and evidence-based library and information practice.

References


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