



The just-in-time librarian consultation service

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Summary

Primary care providers are faced with an amazing variety of illness everyday. The average encounter in the primary care office addresses several different problems. For the provider of first contact, the conditions are at an undifferentiated and disorganized state. It is not possible that the provider will know everything about the many different subjects covered in a typical day at work. There are many ways that the providers currently use to provide effective patient care. The provider may deal with a particular knowledge uncertainty by having the patient return for a second appointment and in this way learn how the condition is evolving. The provider may elect to send the patient to a specialist for consultation. The provider may order tests or try a medication to help address diagnostic uncertainty. The provider may look up in his/her library and reference files the information needed while the patient waits. The provider may call a specialist on the telephone for a telephone consultation. The provider may ask the patient to make a follow up appointment and undertake to look up the information in the meantime. The provider may have a corridor consultation with a colleague or send a request to a librarian for a literature search on a particular topic. All of these options cost time or money to someone within the health care system.

The purpose of this study is to investigate if collaboration between librarians and family physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners improves access to information for high-quality decision making in primary care. It will investigate whether or not a librarian consultation service reduces the workload of clinicians and/or saves them time. As well, it will examine whether or not a librarian consultation service is cost-effective.

This demonstration product will address the following questions:

- Does inter-disciplinary collaboration between the discipline of library and information science and the various disciplines of family medicine, nursing and allied health professions improve access to information for quality patient care decision-making?
- Will the use of an information, communication technology (ICT) enabled librarian consultation service reduce the workload and/or save time for family physicians, nurses and allied health professionals and office staff in FHNs, whether in urban or rural areas?
- Is it cost-effective to use a librarian service to locate and disseminate information to primary care staff in a primary care setting?

This project provides a librarian service to Family Health Networks (FHNs) to answer short reference questions. The project has been introduced into several primary care practices and approximately 85 individuals have been enrolled in the study. The types of reference questions that will qualify for this service include reference questions that can be answered by the librarian in 20 minutes or less. Family physicians,

nurses and other members of the primary care team are taught how to use this service, including how to create a clinical question and which types of questions they may request from the librarian.

A detailed librarian flow chart was developed to assist librarians in selecting electronic evidence-based sources for answering questions. Evidence-based sources were appraised using a validated assessment tool. Physicians and a research librarian in the Department of Family Medicine provided training in evidence-based medicine for the project librarians and support staff. As well, the project librarians received detailed training about the information needs and resources in the family medicine discipline.

This project uses a web-based technical support packages to log and track reference requests through a database. The providers are trained to ask questions by either using a web-based or a Blackberry form. This request is “time and date” stamped and the request is recorded in a database to be processed by the librarian. The librarian replies to the provider electronically and this is also be time and date stamped and recorded in the database. This allows all requests and answers to be recorded in a searchable database to be used by the librarians and project team. A list of most frequently asked questions can be generated at any time. As well, the amount of time of each response is tracked.

This project will use an RCT study design and a mixed methods approach (survey, interviews) for its evaluation. The item of randomization is the reference question. The qualitative assessment also includes an “impact assessment” questionnaire designed to test how the answer to the question influences their practice.

This project uses a simple and efficient model that will ensure easy reproduction in other FHNs either locally, provincially or nationally. By using a remote location for the service support, additional FHNs do not need to find additional space within their own locations for the service. This model could be replicated to use a minimal number of librarians to assist hundreds of FHNs across the province of Ontario. This project will be particularly useful in rural areas as access to large teaching and university centres may not be easily available or accessible. This service can be important for recruitment and retention, especially of new residents, nurses and other health care professionals who are used to a certain level of access to information.