

Hospital Libraries and their Future

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Abstract

Hospital libraries are an integral functioning part of the hospitals that house them because of the many contributions they offer (e.g. learning, dissemination of knowledge, health services etc). Nowadays their function is threatened due to lack of funding that impedes their modernization according to the new demands the information literacy has risen.

1.1. Definitions

According to the American National Standards Institute a hospital library is defined as an entity that serves health professionals, in hospitals or elsewhere, in the private or public sector (ANSI, 1983, 2001). Internationally a hospital library serves as the hospital's primary department for:

- Providing knowledge - based information,
- Developing systems and services to meet the knowledge-based information demands of the organization (Gluck, 2002),
- The Standard 5 of the Medical Library Association (Standards for Hospital Libraries 2002 with revision 2004) suggests the important connection between the Knowledge – based Information and the provided health care,
- The purpose of the library is to serve all user groups of the hospital (Gluck, 2002). Today's hospital libraries have their roots back in the era of colonial America. Their development was parallel to the social transformation of Medicine, as it was concluded by Harvard's University sociologist Paul Starr (Starr, 1982).

1.2. Purposes

The hospital library, according to studies and surveys, through the information that provides to the medical and nursing staff:

- Contributes significantly to the choice or alteration of diagnostics or laboratory examination that will be done to patients.
- Contributes to the confirmation of the diagnosis.
- Contributes to the alteration of the initial diagnosis, in favor of the patient.
- Contributes to the verification of the diagnosis.
- Contributes to the amelioration of patient care.
- Contributes to the avoidance of hospitalization or to the reduction of length of stay and supplementary medical examinations. In general terms it contributes to the reduction of costs.
- Affects in a positive way the nursing practices by making them better.
- Contributes to the on – going training and learning of the staff.
- It appears that it affects patient mortality.
- Supports the needs for information of the hospital researchers and the medical doctors that put the research into practice.

1.3. Negative Climate

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Due to the following reasons a negative climate has emerged for hospital libraries, since their usefulness and necessity are questioned:

- The extremely fast development of the internet and the plethora of information, which are not always true, that it provides.
- The conviction that all the information provided by the internet is free or accessible.
- The increased cost of healthcare and the reduction of state funding for health services.
- The global monetary crisis.

In Greece the prolonged monetary crisis caused significant reduction of funding of the National Health System, resulting in cutbacks for the hospitals and the libraries that operate within them. In 2005 Lindberg & Humphreys predicted that the working positions and the functions of the librarians occupied in the health sector will change until 2015: “It would be usual to find librarians that work as members of healthcare teams to call for proposals for grants, to serve in boards of institutional amendments, to work in bioinformatics data bases, to teach medical lessons and to participate in educational programs for the health services, as well as in other similar collaborations”.

1.4. Conclusions

- Hospital libraries have been and still are an integral functional part of the Health Services that are provided from a hospital and from those working there.
- However, their constant downgrading, especially in our country, threatens the importance of their role.
- Modern times require their modernization and harmonization with the functions, the services and possibilities of the information literacy.
- The librarian is a powerful tool in that effort, as well as in the provision of Health Services in general.

Reference list

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