

Hospital Libraries Consortium: The International Reality and Prospects for the Success of such an Enterprise in Greece

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Abstract: Archiving and creating libraries is of major importance for the health system, as a record of knowledge and experience is created, which can contribute to the development of techniques, methodologies and the whole health system function. Unfortunately, due to various limitations, such as financial problems, lack of funding, political and social crisis and remote areas, medical libraries usually cannot operate independently. For this reason, consortia have been created, through which collaborations, exchange of knowledge and methods emerge, thus contributing to the progress of science. This article lists the ways in which such consortia operate around the world, as well as the ways in which they seem to have overcome any problems during their function. Also, types of such consortia in Greece are analyzed, when and under what conditions they started, how they evolved over the years, the difficulties they face, the efforts to update and modernize their systems, as well as possible future solutions to their difficulties.

Keywords: Libraries consortium, Medical libraries, Hospital libraries, International Health Libraries, Library management

1. Introduction

The health system is a major complexed network, which needs detailed archiving and libraries. Such systems are called medical or health libraries and have a key-part, laying the foundation of comprehensive knowledge. Unfortunately, due to budgetary constraints, there is a difficulty for them to function independently. The solution to the problem described before, was the creation of consortia. (L, H., & M, P., 2003). One of the benefits of participating in a consortium is the ability to participate in collective markets, as well as easy access to resources. Another benefit is the collaboration with people of the same age, with whom it is possible to exchange ideas to achieve any goals. (Schlimgen, J., McCray, J., Perry, G., &Flance, L., 2001) A consortium has many working-models in order to function properly and prosper. These models depend on the source of each problem, which can be either financial or political. Consortia are of paramount importance in the development and advancement of science and especially in the field of health. Hospital libraries contribute to the development of knowledge and professional experience, to the improvement of skills and to the way patients are cared for (Paul M. Blobaum, 2014). There are many sparced-populated countries or even others which have political troubles, such as political isolation, warzones, dictatorship or very strict religious rules. In this kind of region, data alterations are often observed and the network access is limited (McKee, M., Stuckler, D., &Basu, S., 2012).

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1.1. Open Access libraries (OA)

The set of principles and means that can be found in the process without payment or any other condition. It started by including mainly academic publications and has now covered almost all types of published scientific research. Their funding comes from donations or public funding and not from the individual reader. In 2001 the first open library, which was created and developed by the WHO, was released. It's named Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI). It is accessible to all countries and the price they pay is determined by their GDP. The aim of HINARI is to provide quality publications and bridge the digital health gap. Another open access library is AGORA, Global Online Research in Agriculture which started in 2003. It is like HINARI, but its administration is in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. There is a big list of other OA libraries depending on the field and country. (Chan, L., & Costa, S., 2021)

2. Consortia function worldwide

In the USA, library consortia have existed since 1933 in the academic community. Over the years and with the advancement of technology, they have evolved to include many thousands of sources. Thus, their contribution to the progress of the faith was very important. (Van Schaik, J., & Moore, M. (2011)

One of the working-models is used by the South Australian Human Services Libraries Consortium. The first procedure for this plan is that there has to be a source of knowledge. This is the main reason that funds are necessary, so that can be purchased. In order for the consortium to function through this method, a cost-sharing model has to be developed, so the best possible result can be achieved based on budgets. Due to limited revenue and lack of funding, two measures were implemented which categorized the ways and volume of use of library data. After the type of use was identified, then a statistical analysis was performed per customer-organization in order to modify the payments. then four usage categories were created, each of which provided specific features to its users. So, each customer could choose the package that suited him and pay the corresponding price. (L, H., & M, P., 2003)

Unlike with the problem South Australia had, there are many regions, mainly sparsely-populated islands, which have very limited information sources, because of the lack of institutions they have. The method of dealing with the deficiencies that occur in the small island states seems to be facilitated through the distance learning courses and the joint ventures that are created between all the universities and health institutions that exist per island group. A problem of a different kind is faced by the countries of the former Soviet Union, which laid a false foundation for the foundation of their achievements in health by using methods and medicines that had been withdrawn or considered inappropriate. As a result, the studies can neither be considered valid nor be cited. Also in these areas, most of the published works are in Russian, making them difficult to access and read by Western scientists. The African continent faces a variety of problems, based on a lack of education and infrastructure. There are problems with language learning and with some countries that are more isolated. On the positive side, in some countries, great strides are being made in the development of health infrastructure, with the result that there are some educational institutions that work with countries in Europe (McKee, M., Stuckler, D., & Basu, S., 2012).

At the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital in the United Kingdom, the Koha 3.0 authentication system was implemented, which seems very promising, as it overcomes difficulties faced by its predecessors. (Bissels, G., 2008).

In the USA, The Arizona Health Information Network, after some unsuccessful authentication systems, tried the Athens system, which it uses with absolute success, because it provides security and convenience to the user, both on the part of the employee and on the part of the client. (Sewell, R., 2008)

Nowadays, due to technological development, but also because of the budget that is decreasing, the consortia aim at electronic services and resources, in order to carry out their work. (Pereira, R., & Franco, M. (2020)

3. Medical libraries and Consortia in Greece and future aspects

Libraries all over the world hold a significant amount of information. In several sectors this information can prove to be crucial. Health is a sector where access to information anytime and anywhere can save lives. That is the main reason why medical libraries exist. With technological evolution and lack of space these libraries were transformed in databases.

Back in 1983 there have been an initiative for gathering in a united system all the libraries of a country. In Greece this happened with the Union Catalogue of Periodicals, which until 2000 included 206 libraries. The libraries are combined in a form of database and communication, journal exchange and interlibrary loans can happen with great ease. The catalogue was held by 'HERMES', NDC's (National Hellenic Documentation Centre) computer. Part of this catalogue is SERI, which, specifically, includes the scientific and research libraries. Another revolution in the digital era of libraries was the creation of HILLnet which was responsible for making collaboration between libraries easier and ordering journal articles online. Along with HILLnet, HEALink was another system responsible for consortium that started operating in 1999. (Tsimpoglou, F., 2000)

In the years between 1990 and 1995, subscriber's percentage in journals increased to 82 per cent. This fact forced libraries to adopt a new form of policy and resorted to interlibrary loans, in order to deal with expenses. In the following years, this method proved to be uneconomic and time consuming. In Greece, interlibrary loans were never a good solution, even though libraries' budgets were insufficient and dormant. In 1998, though, an introduction of Greek academic librarians to the list of International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) seemed really auspicious. Along with the creation of HEAL-link, a license agreement, which can allow access to about 3,500 journals only with someone's IP recognition, students and academics can read and obtain papers and studies among some seriously priced published titles. HEAL-link's collaboration with ScienceDirect was one of the best for the Greek libraries as it gave access to a number of journals worldwide and broaden the horizons for a better future. Finally, following ICOLC guidelines helped cooperation with other consortia and better deals were achieved focused on the needs of each library and not publishers' interests. (Dervou, C., 2001).

Evolution of libraries was significant in the last century. Modernization in Greece's libraries, though, was obstructed by a list of problems. Among them was the legal framework, which was outdated and the educational system, which tended to be more teacher-centered. Further solutions and developments has to be taken in order to update Greece's medical libraries and make them European worthy. Below, systems that work in Greece are explained. (Papazoglou, A. & Semertzaki, E., 2001)

Inside a hospital there are numerous departments. In each department there are sections with patients. Those patients and their condition can give physicians great amount of information for future circumstances and can be gathered in a single network. This network can afterward be used by the libraries and help in making decisions about serious matters. (Kostagiolas P. A., Ziavrou K., Alexias G. & Niakas D., 2012)

Diagnosis often depends on medical history documents. With technology's massive development these documents became virtual records called EMRs (Electronic Medical Record). EMRs can help enrich libraries and give physicians more information about patients under any circumstances. Better checked and more high quality EMRs can and may improve the health level of any country. Furthermore, EMRs contribute to better cost control as long as libraries are concerned. These records can used in the future by artificial intelligence in order to manage the deceases and help physicians' decisions. (Katakakis, D., 2018)

In 2001 there has been a reorganization in Greece's National Health Care System. 'IASYS', which is an information system, was created in 2005 and its primary responsibility is to manage patient appointments. That was a significant moment as it brought Greece in the new technological era. Later in 2011, an interface called ESY was founded and gathered in its network services such as National Blood Bank, National Ambulance Immediate Care Service and personal records from patients and medical libraries. This great move meant that everything was online and easy for everyone to reach, dealing along with problems that was obscuring libraries work. (Lappa, E., Chaleplioglou, A., Cognetti, G., Seta, M., Cheyne, F., & Juan-Quilis, V. et al., 2012).

Libraries in Greece faced an unexpected evolution throughout the past ten years, going from printed journals and periodicals to online databases. Such an example is HEAL-link a consortium that was formed in 1998 and can give access to numerous journals online. Combined with HEAL-link other infrastructures made their appearance in Greece. ILL system (SmILLE) is a digital library along with AmeLIB which can enable print-disabled people to read. Kallipos, also, is a database which gives open access to over 500 licensed textbooks and Future library, which was founded in 2011 at Veroia and gathers more than 100 both public and municipal libraries in its network. Overall, there are many partnerships too, like Committee of the Support Libraries and Hellenic economic Libraries Network. The last years there is a trend to switching in open access documents. For that reason, Openaccess.gr came to life and enabled the free access to many journals online. Another specific example of online libraries is iLSEAB, concerning literacy. Nowadays, Greek Libraries Network consist of 220 libraries with future potentials being extremely hopeful. (Glossiotis, G., Vassilakaki, E., & Semertzaki, E., 2019)

The COVID-NMA project is a mean of consortium that provides a living mapping of all trials and a comprehensive living synthesis of all available trial evidence evaluating the effect of interventions for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19. COVID-19 database, which is produced by the World Health Organization's International Clinical Trials Registry Platform, is screened every week and helps identify eligible randomize control trials (RCTs). The project also involves a living systematic review, which is based on a living protocol that is scalable to stakeholders' evolving needs. Although the project can bring precious information to medical community and enrich hospital libraries some issues arise. First, sustainability of the project is an issue as pandemic continues to exist and expand. This can only means that the amount of data being processed increases. Therefore, new methods of data analysis are required, in order to keep this model up to date. Second, culture is a field that is affected. Due to reluctant stakeholders or adhesion to reporting guidelines results might be obscured from publishing. (Boutron, I., Chaimani, A., Meerpohl, J., Hróbjartsson, A., Devane, D., & Rada, G. et al., 2020).

Open access models give the privilege of free information among both medical community and people willing to edit, write a thesis or a survey. This model was first introduced in Budapest. The philosophy behind Budapest's open access initiative was the cooperation among libraries. Although in Greece there are numerous online databases for finding information, open access models seem far away from Greece's database. (Lappa, E., Chaleplioglou, A., Cognetti, G., Seta, M., Cheyne, F., & Juan-Quilis, V. et al., 2012)

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