

Fully Realising the Value of Health Library and Knowledge Services

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Abstract

Introduction

To bridge the gap between research and practice, [Health Education England](#) (HEE) encourages healthcare organisations to 1) strengthen their capability to manage knowledge and mobilise evidence; 2) allocate the right expertise and resources to realise the business benefits of NHS libraries.

To realise this value, information professionals must be persuasive in answering the perennial challenges posed by employers: 1) What value do libraries add? 2) Why should we invest in knowledge specialists? We face new challenges too: What is our role and how do we build the skills necessary to support users in the digital age?

This paper shares the findings of research to address these challenges.

Methods

HEE commissioned a health economics study of National Health Service (NHS) knowledge and library services. The team: 1) developed a framework; 2) assessed two components of the service: Evidence reviews and Embedded librarians; 3) conducted an economic analysis of case studies.

CILIP, the library and information association, led research into the impact of new technologies on library roles and ways of working. The study drew on an extensive literature review and interviews with 21 experts from across the UK.

Results

The Gift of Time reports that library teams provide healthcare staff with time-saving accelerated access to better quality evidence. This enables the NHS to meet its duty to utilise research evidence, and healthcare professionals to use their time more effectively. Knowledge services potentially generate an overall economic benefit of £132m per annum for the NHS, a net economic benefit of

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£77m pa. The study reports on research which found a cost benefit ratio of 3:1 for an embedded knowledge specialist.

The CILIP Review identifies challenges, opportunities and the competencies needed to deliver on these. Opportunities created by Artificial Intelligence and machine learning align to roles that librarians already play.

Discussion

To enable the NHS to fully realise the value of library services, HEE recommends that organisations improve staffing ratios for knowledge specialists per member of the NHS workforce. This can be achieved incrementally through service and role redesign as well as by expanding this specialist workforce.

The Technology review informed revision of CILIP's *Professional Knowledge and Skills Base*. The aim is to influence the teaching, learning and professional development of librarians. There is a need to translate relevant skills to the new context of AI and this repositioning requires effort and experimentation.

Conclusion

The NHS is hungry for solutions that bring research evidence, data and information together as actionable intelligence. AI is reshaping the ways teams create, discover, share and use information. We expect the emergence of new roles and responsibilities for knowledge specialists working alongside clinical teams and health informaticians.

Keywords: Libraries, Medical Knowledge Management, Cost Benefit Analysis, Evidence-Based Practice, Information Technology

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