

Fundamental Lessons From the Covid-19 Pandemic: Perspective of Health Sciences Librarians in Zambia

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Abstract

Introduction

The sudden and unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the health sciences librarians, to ascertain ways of working in a rapid time frame like shifting to digital platforms wherever possible and to provide adequate remote services to the users. The impact and magnitude of the pandemic caught many off guard, leading to library closures and displaced staff. Many libraries struggled to pull together, work at home, plan for staff and provide the equipment and services necessary for them to do so.

The main objective of the study was to explore the lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic from the perspective of health sciences librarians in Zambia. The specific objectives included: finding out the lessons learned from COVID-19 by health sciences librarians in Zambia, ascertaining the role of health sciences librarians in a pandemic and determining the challenges faced by health sciences librarians in the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Methods

The study was a survey of six medical university libraries and the sample size was 14 health sciences librarians. An online questionnaire was the main data collection tool and 11 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 78.5%. Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20 while qualitative data was analyzed thematically.

Results

The results of the study showed that health sciences librarians have learnt a number of lessons from the current pandemic. 19.0% of librarians indicated that they have learnt innovative ways to deliver and provide services to patrons remotely while 18.9% have learned how to continually adjust and adapt to new technology. With regard to roles 45.5% respondents mentioned provision of information services remotely. In terms of challenges, 29.2% of the respondents bemoaned the lack of collaboration from health professionals.

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Discussion

The study established that health sciences librarians have played different roles during the pandemic and the main ones being the dissemination of information on the pandemic remotely and ensuring that library users have access to information despite them not physically visiting the library. The main challenges librarians faced in the provision of information during the COVID-19 pandemic include lack of collaboration with health professionals; poor Information Communication Technology and lack of media platform to inform the public on the virus.

Conclusion

The study therefore concludes that for librarians to keep afloat during the pandemic, services like remote access to e-resources, open access resources, resources related to COVID-19 and many more should be introduced in libraries. It is recommended that all libraries attached to learning institutions embrace the use of electronic resources especially those that can be accessed remotely in order to be able to support our nation during the current and future pandemics. It is also recommended that health sciences librarians collaborate with health professionals and other stake holders involved in the provision of information on the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, health sciences libraries; health sciences librarians; Zambia

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