

Health-care practice environments

Nursing librarian: an educator of future nurses

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Keywords

Information services, Nurses, Librarians, Library facilities, Curriculum development, Higher education

Abstract

The importance of "information literacy" in the education of nursing students continues to increase. In response, partnerships between nursing faculty and librarians are developing. The shortage of nurses and the rapid changes in information technology have created opportunities for librarians to educate nursing faculty and students about locating information, evaluating resources, and managing information. The type of instruction and support needed varies, depending on the level of the nursing student. Become a partner with the nursing faculty by attending meetings, having an office in the college of nursing, participating in social networking, and exploring ways in which a librarian can provide assistance. These partnerships provide benefits to nursing programs, nursing faculty and librarians.

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The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at

www.emeraldinsight.com/0090-7324.htm

Reference Services Review

Volume 32 · Number 1 · 2004 · pp. 40-44

© Emerald Group Publishing Limited · ISSN 0090-7324

DOI 10.1108/00907320410519388

Introduction

The nursing shortage is a topic often mentioned in the media. The number of nurses needed to care for an aging population continues to increase, while more nurses leave the profession and fewer apply to enter nursing school. While nursing schools, community colleges, colleges and universities struggle to supply more qualified nurses, their efforts are hindered by the shortage of faculty (Nevidjon and Erickson, 2001).

The nursing profession shares some important similarities with librarianship. Although more males have begun to enter both professions, there are more females in both professions and nursing is often an individual's second career (Terrell, 2002). Nursing and librarianship depend on many types of information and require the individual to develop lifelong learning skills to adapt and remain effective, as their professional role continually changes. Aging of the profession is an important issue to both (Lenzini, 2002). Finally, these professions are practiced in a plethora of environments and individuals require a variety of skills, knowledge and education to be successful.

The routes that an individual may follow to become a nurse include: vocational/technical schools, hospital/diploma schools, community colleges, colleges and universities. Nursing librarians can be partners in the education of nurses in most of these settings; however, it most commonly occurs at colleges and universities. The shortage of nursing faculty has created opportunities for librarians to teach nursing students what librarians know best: the Internet and reliable resources, database searching, source evaluation, how to locate resources and organize information. There is an increase in the number of positions that colleges or schools of nursing are unable to fill with nursing faculty. To provide the skills and knowledge needed by nursing students and faculty, some schools with vision and creativity have hired faculty from other areas, such as librarianship. The University of Florida is one such college.

Role creation

In the spring of 1999, the University of Florida Health Science Center Library (HSCL)



implemented a librarian liaison program (Tennant *et al.*, 2001). Each of the six colleges was assigned a liaison to provide a single point of contact. The liaison librarians performed these duties in addition to their other duties as reference librarians. This program has seven focus areas:

- (1) Communication.
- (2) Collection development.
- (3) Education.
- (4) User service.
- (5) Information access.
- (6) Liaison development.
- (7) Evaluation.

The positive reception of this program encouraged the director of the HSCL to begin discussions with the deans in the Health Center about the possibility of each college hiring their own librarian. That librarian would be on their faculty and would focus on providing service to the faculty and students from that college. The first college to agree to try this model was the College of Nursing. A joint search committee composed of faculty from the College of Nursing and the HSCL began the task of identifying candidates. The first College of Nursing librarian/liaison was appointed late in the Fall of 2000.

Role description

The position description states that the College of Nursing librarian/liaison is responsible for the smooth integration of the HSCL's services into the teaching, research and clinical programs of the college. This librarian is also responsible for providing library-related educational activities and classes to students, faculty and staff of the College of Nursing. The position description also states that this person provides special assistance to the College of Nursing faculty in the areas of course development, research, information acquisition, faculty development and strategic planning.

There are some other elements not included in this position description but essential to the success of the position. Necessary elements include developing relationships with faculty, developing an understanding of the role and information needs of nursing faculty, staff,

students and working nurses. Knowledge of faculty research is necessary, so that routing of related items as they are identified is possible. Marketing services, skills and willingness to become a functional member of the college are essential. Fortunately the library liaison program began the groundwork by promoting course-integrated library instruction and a relationship between the college and the library sprouted.

Most colleges and schools of nursing offer a variety of programs, which present slightly different information needs. Programs usually include a traditional Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), a registered nurse (RN) to BSN, Master's in nursing as a nurse practitioner, nurse educator or clinical nurse specialist, Doctorate of Philosophy in nursing. Some offer a hybrid program that allows degreed students from other fields to transition to nursing.

The majority of students in the BSN program tend to be young, attending college right out of high school. Many of them are fairly computer-literate, since they have used computers extensively. However, their computer skills and comfort levels lead them to conclude that everything is online and free. They can be rather efficient in locating information on the Web and resist physically coming to the library. If an article or book is not full text online, they do not want to be bothered with it. Often they do not understand that there is a difference between the types of material retrieved from databases and retrieval from a search engine. They are quick to understand the mechanics of database searching and rapidly become independent. Entering BSN students sometimes struggle with the concept of controlled vocabulary due to the fact that searching by free text is so ingrained. Using controlled vocabulary can be difficult, because they are just beginning their professional training and may lack sufficient comprehension of the medical language and nursing terminology used in specialized databases such as Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) and MEDLINE.

Their first assignments often require them to locate books and articles about historic aspects of the nursing profession. As a result, the first session of teaching focuses on:

- Basic use of the online public access catalog (OPAC).
- Layout of the library.
- Accessing resources from off campus.
- Boolean logic.
- Controlled vocabulary.
- Basic use of CINAHL (a nursing literature database).

The RN to BSN group is made up of individuals who are RNs but do not have a Bachelor's degree. They received their nursing education by attending either an associate degree program or a diploma school. They have already worked for several years, and are interested in specializing in a particular area of nursing that requires a higher education level. As a group they tend to be older than the traditional BSN students. They are more mature and comfortable with the nursing material, but often lack skill and confidence in dealing with technology. If this group has had experience with library catalogs and databases, it may have been with the paper variety. Many are technophobic and hands-on exercises can be very useful in developing skills and confidence. Often they have difficulty in comprehending that an electronic copy of a print journal is just another format of a print journal and not the equal of a commercial Web site on a topic. It is necessary to convince this group that I am a resource for them and available to assist or work with them. Convincing these students that you are available often reduces their stress. This group often develop into some of my most ardent supporters.

Nursing students at the Master's level contain a combination of these two groups. Some students have just completed their BSN and are continuing through to earn a Master's degree; and others have been out of school for many years working and have returned to earn an advanced degree. Master's level students require a higher level of expertise in database searching, information management, and familiarity with technology to successfully complete their program. Their need for information becomes more multidisciplinary at this level due to increased specialization. Depending on their area of interest and specialization, they may use information from

the fields of education, sociology, psychology, health business and tend to need more disease-specific information than BSN nurses usually need. It is often helpful to meet individually with these students, to refine their skills and reduce their frustration in locating the material they need for their research. This group often needs assistance with determining which materials are available, how to obtain copies of items in other campus libraries and document delivery procedures. There is a wide range of skill levels in this group. It can be useful to informally assess their skill levels and areas of research and tailor the instruction to their needs.

Doctoral programs usually focus on research and universities often employ these students as research assistants. In an ideal situation, they are paired with a faculty member that has an ongoing research project that is in their area of interest. Faculty may utilize these research assistants to perform literature searches, obtain needed articles and books, manage the bibliographical information, and perform some of the actual research. They often record and manage the collected data in a statistical program. The Doctoral student's dissertation is frequently based on some portion of the research project. The librarian needs to tailor education offerings for this group to be very specific and of a high level. It is important to determine students' level of computer skill and experience with databases to provide relevant instruction. Individual sessions designed for each individual are most successful.

Lessons learned

The two areas that are changing very rapidly are health care and information science. The nursing faculty must deal with both of these areas. A crucial role of a nursing librarian/educator is the continuous education of faculty. Isolating the relevant changes with regard to interfaces, products available and library services offered is invaluable to busy faculty. Faculty may be able to perform a simple search to locate the information they seek, but they may need assistance with a more complex search. Owing to training and experience, nursing librarians are usually able to run better

quality searches more efficiently. It is often very effective to sit with faculty as they perform a search. This provides an opportunity to educate them about new database features, efficient ways of searching, accessing full text or even to suggest additional, more appropriate databases. It is also beneficial to me, since it provides an opportunity to increase my knowledge. Assisting faculty with searches provides the librarian with an opportunity to become familiar with the area of research. Learning about faculty research topics enables me to filter resources specific to their needs and interests. Subscribing to alerting services is a simple way for me to keep up to date and assist faculty. Doing very short updates/demos for faculty at general meetings is well received on such topics as remote access to library resources, Cochrane Database of Systematic reviews or Medline Plus.

Knowledge of medical terminology is very important. I would strongly recommend taking a course in medical terminology. I attended many Grand Rounds presentations on clinical topics, took notes, and looked up many definitions. The five years that I spent as a hospital librarian supporting administrators, physicians, residents, nurses, nursing students, and patients and patient family members provided me with a variety of clinical knowledge. The nurse educators were wonderful in explaining concepts, diseases, and procedures. They also educated me about the many roles nurses perform.

To be a successful nursing librarian/educator, faculty support is necessary. Having the faculty regard you as "one of them" is critical. It is helpful to have an office and a mailbox in the nursing school and to have scheduled office hours. Attending general faculty, committee meetings, retreats, luncheons, and social events allows the librarian to develop relationships and learn more about the activities of the college. Tips I offer include:

- constantly look for opportunities to assist and support the faculty and staff;
- keep your eyes and ears open for situations where you might collaborate with faculty on projects, articles, or presentations;
- be patient, because relationships will not occur overnight. Identify someone in the library who has more experience with

networking or is better acquainted with the members of the college; they can be an invaluable resource for you;

- find nursing faculty members who are receptive;
- target new faculty members and educate them about services you can provide. Offer to demonstrate the library Web site, resources and how to access electronic resources from home or office.

Such relationships with nursing faculty can develop into opportunities for grant writing, paper and poster presentations outside the library venue, recruiting students for the college, conducting research projects, serving as a minority mentor for the University, judging health lecture/demonstrations, or exhibiting at local events. The more involved you are in the college and the community, the more opportunities you will have to demonstrate that you are competent, enthusiastic and dependable. Having a school-specific librarian/educator has become a selling point for prospective faculty and students.

The library liaison/educator program has resulted in more continuity in the education of the nursing students with regard to searching and utilizing the literature at this University. Is everything functioning on a perfect level? No, but we continue to progress towards that goal. Learning and teaching information management with Reference Manager and EndNote is a goal yet to be attained. Teaching students about Evidence-Based Practice has begun, but not to the desired extent. Incorporating clinical librarianship into clinical rotations is another goal not yet attained.

This type of position involves preparing hand-outs, teaching classes, and making presentations. My undergraduate degree is in special education. Prior to becoming a librarian, I taught a variety of students for many years. If your background is not in education, it might be helpful for you to take a course on information literacy or teaching adult learners.

Professional gains

This type of position has the potential for providing phenomenal professional growth and

opportunities for a librarian. Nursing is a very multi-disciplinary profession; nurses employ resources from a variety of professions in their research. This position can provide many opportunities to stretch professionally. I have broadened my reference skills to include more social science material, and the experiences gained are much broader than those of most librarians. The College of Nursing affiliation has helped me to become involved in some of the broader activities of the university. I am currently a mentor in the Minority Mentor program to three freshman students planning to study nursing. This position has some travel opportunities attached; I have traveled to other parts of the state to present orientation and database training to distance education students. My grant/subcontract skills have improved. A subcontract from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine covered the cost of providing training to students at a historically black college and university in another part of the state. I recently exhibited National Library of Medicine products at a state nursing conference. Librarians who can search for opportunities and involvement with vigilance, persistence and patience will be rewarded with experiences that are much broader, richer and more challenging than the norm. I enjoy variety and challenges. My position as a nursing librarian satisfies this need.

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