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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Health librarians in Ireland have significant challenges. The country’s financial crises means that the resources needed to support professional development, to maintain knowledge-based information resources and to overcome existing gaps in service provision will be far less available in future. These challenges are exacerbated by the need for evidence to drive forward the health services reform agenda, to inform the strategic development and sustainability of health libraries and library services. This report provides an overview of the current state of affairs, and identifies the key actions that will be necessary to enable health librarians in Ireland to secure the future of their profession.

Why was this report commissioned?

Stakeholder views

The report was commissioned to inform the strategic development and sustainability of health libraries and library services in Ireland. The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) fund and commission the health libraries and information services in Ireland, and HSLG has been mandated to take on the role of the library association for the health service. The health service is in a period of change and development in Ireland, and there is a need for evidence to inform the strategic development and sustainability of health libraries.

The range of activities undertaken by health librarians in Ireland is broad, and there is a significant skills gap in the future as senior staff retire. Health librarians, particularly those outside the academic sector, feel that their services are vulnerable to cuts in staffing, which have already affected their ability to provide the level of service expected by users. As a result of these cuts, staff training and development have been reduced, and this is a growing concern for the future. Health librarians are therefore proactively looking for innovative ways of working which can help them to overcome the perceived lack of value of the library service.

Stakeholder views

The evidence gathered in the study culminates in the following recommended actions, to be taken by various stakeholders.

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Health librarians’ views

The health librarians were able to identify three main themes from these interviews, which are relevant to the future development of the health library service in Ireland. These themes are:

- The need for evidence to drive forward the health services reform agenda
- The need for evidence to inform the strategic development and sustainability of health libraries
- The need for evidence to support the development of clinical librarian services

Identify champions and promote advocacy

The report recommends a number of actions that should be taken by various stakeholders.

- Greater advocacy and systematic evaluation of the use of health libraries and library services.
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Executive summary

Health librarians in Ireland have significant challenges. The country’s fiscal crisis means that the resources needed to support professional development, to maintain knowledge-based information resources and to ensure existing gaps in service provision will be few and far between. These challenges compound the significance of these findings. Health librarians in Ireland are responsible for the health and welfare of the population in the health system is fully recognised. Stimulating advocacy and systematic evaluation of health librarians is crucial for the provision of that data will help inform the development of the future health service. Stakeholders identified the need to improve the visibility of the role of health librarians. Health librarians in Ireland are valued for their contributions to clinical care, continuing professional development, and on efforts to develop the skills of those junior staff. Librarians identified the need to provide evidence for the role of health librarians in the health service. Librarians are engaged in the following ways:...
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Health librarians in Ireland have significant challenges. The country's financial crisis means that the resources needed to support professional development, in terms of knowledge-based information services and resources to ensure continuing gaps in service provision will be hard to find. To compound these pressures, the health system in Ireland is facing increased workloads, and the financial crisis is impacting heavily on the availability of funding for health services. Despite these difficulties, health librarians have responded to the need for improved health services and to the demands of the public. They continue to provide a significant contribution to the achievement of the government's vision for a quality-driven, patient-centred health service. Librarians are also identified as having a lack of visibility of libraries, and a perception among health librarians of a lack of understanding at senior management level and of health librarians. However, there is also a perception that the health system is facing a significant workforce gap in the future, especially in terms of the roles of professional and para-professional staff.

Health librarians' views

Health librarians, particularly those outside the academic sector, feel that their services are vulnerable to cuts in staffing, which have already affected their ability to provide a comprehensive service to users in the health sector. Despite these cutbacks, health librarians continue to provide professional development, and to work to develop the skills of junior staff. Health librarians review patient records, and are responsible for supporting and training medical students and junior staff in information literacy. They are also responsible for disseminating professional information within their workplace, and are involved in clinical meetings and ward rounds. Little evidence was found of the provision of integrated information services or the inclusion of specialized health information content in health education in universities. Health librarians, particularly those outside the academic sector, feel that their services are vulnerable to cuts in staffing, which have already affected their ability to provide a comprehensive service to users in the health sector. Despite these cutbacks, health librarians continue to provide professional development, and to work to develop the skills of junior staff. Health librarians review patient records, and are responsible for supporting and training medical students and junior staff in information literacy. They are also responsible for disseminating professional information within their workplace, and are involved in clinical meetings and ward rounds. Little evidence was found of the provision of integrated information services or the inclusion of specialized health information content in health education in universities.

Stakeholder views

The consensus view of the stakeholders who participated in this study, especially the leaders of service users in academia and in clinical settings and policy makers in the Department of Health and hospital management, as well as librarians and resource providers, is that health librarians and libraries are at a pivotal point in their history. While existing users value them, they are under threat of closure and amalgamation. User access to electronic resources is seen as a key issue by health librarians, and stakeholders identified a lack of visibility of libraries, and a perception among health librarians of a lack of understanding at senior management level and of health librarians. Inequality of access to information appears to be a blurring of distinctions between the roles of professional and para-professional staff. Stakeholders identified that health librarians should be able to offer their information and knowledge skills to the research team. The re-establishment of the library in this department is a golden opportunity to enable access to e-resources for all users. Stakeholders identified that health librarians should be able to offer their information and knowledge skills to the research team. The re-establishment of the library in this department is a golden opportunity to enable access to e-resources for all users.

Why was this report commissioned?

The Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) of the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) commissioned this study for the following reasons:

» To gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in practice;
» To inform the strategic development and sustainability of health libraries and librarianship in Ireland;
» To gain a broad understanding of what is happening in practice;
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The Department of Information Science and the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) of Loughborough University undertook the study between December 2010 and March 2011. The research was funded by both the Health Sciences Libraries Group and the Department of Information Science. Stakeholders include leaders of service users in academia and in clinical settings and policy makers in the Department of Health and the health service executive. The study identified 75 health libraries and information services of different types and sizes in the public health system in Ireland. Forty-nine of these services were located in the academic sector. The study involved 52 stakeholder members, 77 health librarians and 44 library staff in the HSE sector. Twenty-two per cent of respondents were health librarians. The study identified 75 health libraries and information services of different types and sizes in the public health system in Ireland. Forty-nine of these services were located in the academic sector. The study involved 52 stakeholder members, 77 health librarians and 44 library staff in the HSE sector. Twenty-two per cent of respondents were health librarians.

Future directions and international practice

Future health library provision is seen to be dependent on information technology and the propensity of providers to provide services online and where necessary. While advances in this area will no doubt result in the need to provide appropriate mobile phone applications to access mobile resources, health librarians are already placed to support and promote the use of mobile technologies. The role of health librarians will require greater emphasis in future on teaching and induction, literature searching and analysis, and involvement in clinical meetings and ward rounds. Little evidence was found of the use of clinical librarians in hospital settings in Ireland, and this is an area which could be expanded.

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