

Knowing your library

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Patricia Patton outlines the benefits of getting the most out of the College's library resources

IN THE PAST, accessing information involved going to a library and navigating the confusing cataloguing systems, or consulting with the librarians. Nowadays, information has become much more accessible thanks to the internet. The volume of information, however, has grown exponentially.

A medical librarian can be a valuable addition to your practice team, assisting you in finding the right answers to your research and clinical questions, as well as adding reliability and efficiency to your search. They are master searchers, database gurus and experts when it comes to finding and accessing medical information (See Table 1).

Healthcare is information-intensive, and medicine is an ever-evolving field which can result in an information overload. Sackett found, some 20 years ago, that to keep up-to-date with internal medicine, it was necessary to read 17 articles every day.¹ With the amount of clinical literature available online, we need to develop strategies to evaluate the information that is useful for clinical decision-making.


In the age of connectivity, with more patients searching for health information online, it is important that GPs are up to speed, that they feel confident and can guide patients to the right information. As former College president Richard Brennan stated: "The quality consultation will be built on shared decision-making and should result in 'evidence-informed, individualised decision-making'². GPs and their practice teams require ongoing access to current research and best practice in order to deliver a quality service. 

Table 1: Benefits of collaborating with librarians

- Access to experts in information
- Saves time
- Provides you with quality information
- Keeps you up-to-date
- Guides and Informs practice clinical audits
- Access to evidence-based medicine resources
- Improves clinical decision making
- Improves patient-centred care
- Reduces risks and errors
- Teaches you lifelong learning information skills
- Assists you in pursuit of CPD
- Facilitates research and publishing
- Enables education with students, registrars and practice team

"The literature and resources afforded to me by the library have been invaluable. From assisting with literature searches, to spontaneously sending me articles that the librarians knew would be of interest, and the multifaceted support received has supported a number of aspects of both my academic and clinical work."

– Dr Brian McEllistrem, GP and core curriculum fellow

"In my role as CME tutor, the library supplied relevant articles in a timely manner, providing excellent background and evidence for my research. The library helps to keep me up-to-date by sending on articles of interest on this topic on an ongoing basis. I really do feel that the ICGP library is such a great asset for us all."

– Dr Stephanie Dowling, GP and CME tutor

"The library service that the College provides in searching clinical questions has been beneficial to me. Their skill at searching widely in the published literature gives me access to articles that I would perhaps not capture in my own search. Allied to this, your searches encompass other areas outside the journals such as relevant guidelines."

– Dr Cillian Clancy, GP

"Using the 'ask the librarian' service as part of fourth-year GP research project has been invaluable. I learned of new ways to better search for existing literature, eg. different databases, improved keywords or search terms to use. It enlightened me to the use of publications that I was not aware of from having done my initial search, eg. national reports and surveys that were published. I received a speedy reply, and didn't feel judged at my lack of basic knowledge on how best to do a literature review, in fact I only felt encouraged. I feel more confident in doing a literature review again as a result of using the 'ask a librarian' service."

– Dr Sarah Mulligan, GP trainee

"Like many GPs, several clinical questions pop into my head every day. The most common questions I have relate to the evidence behind the effectiveness or side-effects of a medication, the strength of a risk factor or the accuracy of a diagnostic test. Sometimes I need to look for more detailed information – either clinical summaries or research articles (a systematic review, a randomised trial, a cohort study). Much of these sources are behind pay-walls, which can be frustrating. However, ICGP Library services enables us to access many of these services, such as journal articles."

– Dr Mark Murphy, GP and RCSI lecturer

References

1. Smith, R. Strategies for coping with information overload. *BMJ* 2010; 341:c7126
2. Brennan, R. Insight: Richard Brennan looks at maintaining medical trust in the doctor-patient relationship. *Forum* February 2018; 35 (1): 6