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Information literacy in continuing professional development of medical practitioners: a Croatian example

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Introduction

According to the Basel Declaration of the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes/European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS), continuing professional development (CPD) is the ethical responsibility of every medical practitioner.¹ The UEMS defines CPD as a continuing learning process that complements formal undergraduate and postgraduate education and training, helping physicians update and develop the skills and knowledge required in their everyday practice. The Croatian Chamber of Physicians is the national body for granting licence to practice. According to the Chamber's regulations, a licensed medical practitioner has to renew his or her licence through revalidation every six years.² In that period, every practitioner must participate in CPD activities to acquire credits. The minimum required is 20 credits per year (total of 120 for the 6 years). CPD activities may range from attending symposia, seminars and courses, through publishing articles and books, to visiting other departments or centres. At least 50% of the credits should be required in the licensed (sub)specialty. The form in which the practitioners collect the credits is not prescribed.

The University of Zagreb Medical School (UZMS) has been offering a wide range of CPD courses. According to the UZMS Regulations on CPD courses, these are a form of postgraduate education aimed at updating the knowledge and skills acquired during the graduate and postgraduate studies. These are paralleled to the current trends in medical research and practice.³ Every participant of the UZMS courses collects credits assigned to each course in co-operation with the Croatian Chamber of Physicians. As information retrieval and information processing are now seen as core competencies for all clinicians⁴, the Central Medical Library (affiliated with the UZMS) entered the CPD programme by developing a course on finding and appraisal of medical literature.

Setting

The University of Zagreb Medical School (UZMS) is the oldest and largest medical school in Croatia.⁵ By its resources, the Central Medical Library (CML) is the most important Croatian medical library. Its primary function is to serve students, faculty and health care professionals of the parent institution, but also to provide medical information to all local consumers. CML has been active in UZMS education programmes for more than four decades. Its participation was intensified in the 1995/1996 academic year when a mandatory course entitled *Principles of Scientific Research in Medicine* was introduced in the 2nd year graduate curriculum. CML is responsible for a module on medical information.⁶ CML entered the UZMS PhD programme in 2004 with two guided tutorials on finding medical information.⁷ The School's CPD programme was the only educational programme in which the CML did not participate. CML therefore decided to design a CPD course for two main reasons. (i) The CPD programme is an important educational activity, strengthened by the implementation of the Bologna Process in the Croatian higher education area.⁸ The CML has seen its participation in that programme as an enhancement of its teaching role and as an appropriate method for influencing on attitudes toward medical information, as well as for promoting new resources and services available to the local medical community. (ii) The CPD programme offers more than 300 fee-based courses in all medical specialities. The CML's course, offering information literacy, is the first of this type in the UZMS CPD programme. It is also the first programme to be developed and offered by a medical library and accepted by the Croatian Chamber of Physicians.

Method

The CML team, which designed the course, included five librarians experienced in teaching (one of them with the associate professor rank, and two PhD candidates). The team was aware that:

- the UZMS graduate programme already included the basics on searching medical information;⁶
- another UZMS CPD course included the basics of browsing and searching the Web (designed and carried out by the Department for Medical Informatics).

During the initial development of the course, several problems were identified:

- unequal ICT infrastructure at the local health facilities, which reflected on the basic skills of the potential participants;
- local differences in access to information resources between academic and health institutions, which reflected on the course content;
- focus of the course depending on the medical specialty of participants.

Keeping all this in mind, the team decided to offer a course entitled *Finding and Appraisal of Medical Information*, focussed on free available and open-access resources, and customized as much as possible in order to cover the medical specialty of participants. As soon as the Library received the registration forms, they were analysed by the affiliation and status of participants. The responsible librarian then prepared the written scenarios for their hands-on exercises.

Course Content

The course consists of three main sections:

- main characteristics of web medical resources;
- building an effective search strategy;
- web resource search (bibliographic databases, evidence-based medicine sources, e-journals and e-books).

The course was planned to run for 2 days, starting with a lecture on the main characteristics of medical resources on the Web, proceeding with two seminars on building search strategy, and scientific evidence in making clinical decisions, and five hands-on exercises in a computer lab (searching PubMed, consumer health, e-journals/OA journals and locally available commercial journals, e-books/NCBI Book-shelf, FreeBokks4Doctors, and EBM databases). The number of participants was limited to 15 per session.

Course assessment and announcement

The assessment of the course content by the respective school's committee was positive. The second evaluation step was performed by the Chamber's Committee on CPD.² The courses are categorized as local or international according to the lists of instructors. The courses having a programme of at least 20 h and an obligatory post-test are allocated a Category 1 and

can be granted a maximum of 15 credits. The CML course was granted 11 credits. of the course was the same (granted by 11 credits).

The course was listed in the School's CPD brochure. This brochure contains the complete list of CPD courses offered by the UZMS, with a short course description, date and fee. It also encloses a registration form. The brochure is sent to more than 1000 addresses all over the country. The course is also announced on the Library's web page.

Course reporting

All participants have to fill out the post-test and evaluation forms. The post-test includes 5 multi choice questions covering the topics of five hands-on exercises. Each correct answer has a value of 1 point. The pass score is set at 3 points.

The Chamber's report form consists of the participants' names and their pass scores. CML sends the filled form to the Chamber.

Outcome

The course has been delivered four times so far to a total of 55 participants (Table 1).

For the first three courses, the evaluation form was very simple and consisted of three yes or no questions. These questions addressed the quality of the course content, teaching methods, and practical application of the acquired skills and knowledge. Although the open-ended comments suggested possible changes (more practical exercises, basic and advanced course level, course manual, etc.), the results of the analysis were not discriminative at all. All participants except one were completely satisfied with the course content and its practical value.

Therefore, a new evaluation form was introduced at the latest session. It was filled out by the 20 participants; the results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

The evaluation form also contained three open-ended questions asking about expectations of the course and ways in which they are or are not being met. A section for suggestions on how to improve the course was also included.

Three participants stated that they were not satisfied with the session length (too short), and share of the practical exercises (not enough). Fourteen participants stated that they are most satisfied with the competence of the instructors, the lively and pleasant session's atmosphere, and the information on the available resources they were not aware before. The

comments on areas which could be improved were mostly aimed at greater share of practical exercises. Three participants stated that it would be better to organize the course at the elementary and advanced level.

The next course will be in part redesigned according to the evaluation results. The programme will be completely based on hands-on exercises. The evaluation form will be further refined to address a more specific account on the needs and wishes of participants.

Conclusions

The participation in the formal education programme of the parent institution is crucial for the visibility and perception of an academic library's role. The participation of the Central Medical Library at University of Zagreb Medical School in the school's CPD programme, as well as the Library's co-operation with the Croatian Chamber of Physicians has been useful at three levels: (i) dissemination of the new medical information and skills into the local medical community; (ii) perception of a medical library's powerful role in information literacy programmes, and (iii) reinforcing position of the library in its academic environment.

Key messages

Implications for Policy

- The participation in the formal education programmes of the parent institution is crucial for the visibility and perception of an academic medical library.
- Lifelong learning is an area which has been receiving more attention in the implementation of the Bologna Goals.
- The ability to locate, critically evaluate, and use of medical information is an important component of doctors' continuing professional development (CPD).

Implications for Practice

- Librarians might consider participation in CPD programmes by developing information literacy courses.

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Table 1 Distribution of the course participants according to their affiliation and status

Affiliation	Medical doctors	Residents	Others
Hospitals	8	20	3
General Practice	16	-	-
Medical Schools	4	-	-
Pharmaceutical companies	4	-	-
Total	32	20	3

Table 2 Analysis of evaluation forms

Satisfaction with the course content			The instructors were			The presentation style was		
Not useful	helpful	Very useful	Poorly prepared	Adequately prepared	Well prepared	poor	right	excellent
3	2	15	0	3	17	2	6	12