Evaluating the impact of a hospital library literature search survey

Christie Hurrell, Marcus Vaska, Yongtao Lin, Elizabeth Aitken

Knowledge Resource Service, University of Calgary

Introduction

- The Health Information Network Calgary (HINC) offered a mediated literature search service for physicians, healthcare staff, administrators, and patients of a regional health authority in Alberta.
- Literature search requests were accepted in person, as well as by phone, e-mail, or web form submission.
- Library staff conducted searches to the clients' specifications and sent results in the form of a bibliography with abstracts.
- In 2010, the Network moved to standardize its literature search service by developing and implementing a template for delivering results to clients.
- The Network also decided to develop a web-based survey to assess client satisfaction with the literature search service, to determine its value to the health care system, and to identify gaps in services and searchers' skills.

Setting

HINC provided library services from 7 physical and 1 virtual site plus a number of municipal districts surrounding the Calgary area.

Methods

Based on a literature review and needs assessment, we developed and pilot tested a web-based survey containing five questions.

A request to complete the survey was sent to clients by e-mail two weeks after they received their literature search results. The survey was set up in such a way that results for each of the 8 HINC sites could be viewed individually.

The survey used a combination of closed- and open-ended questions to ask about clients' satisfaction with, and use of, the literature search results, as well as how the service could be improved.

Results

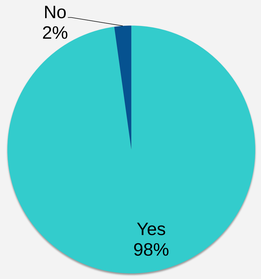
Between July 2010 and June 2013, the HINC team completed 4229 literature searches and received 406 responses to the survey.

Descriptive statistics were used while evaluating results from closed-ended questions, and responses to open-ended questions were analyzed by two different coders. Each coder developed a coding scheme comprised of key themes. The coders met to compare schemes, and differences were resolved via a consensus process. Illustrative quotes are presented below.

1. Have you ordered or downloaded any full text articles from the citation list we sent you?

87% respondents indicated yes.

2. Did you find the literature search useful?



3. How can we improve our literature search service?

The most common themes in these responses included requests for: fewer and/or more relevant results, easier access to full-text articles, and more consultation to improve search precision.

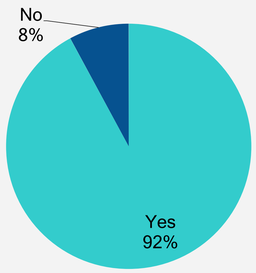
> "There were a large number of studies to sift through. Had I known, I may have suggested a couple of other filters."

> "It would be SO nice if the articles were hyperlinked on the lit search results. It would make it so much faster to get to the articles."

> "More two way communication between the requester and the 'searcher' so the list of references can be more relevant. We did try this once and did come up with a second set of references - these were still not fully 'on the mark'."

> "It's always hard for me to know what language to use that corresponds to the languages of each database and search tool."

4. Did you use any of the information we have found for you in your practice or research?



5. Could you explain more?

The most common uses of the literature search results were for: research/teaching; patient/client care; and creation or change in policies, practices, guidelines, or programs.

> "Finding this article was an amazing asset to the research proposal development. We tried to find relevant articles non stop, and our librarian found something most pertinent that we would not have come across."

> "I'm currently using the information for a provincial task force developing Best Practice Guidelines for Adult Feeding and Swallowing."

> "The information provided gave me better understanding about possible problems clients might experience. It also informed and shaped my psychotherapy with this particular client. Client was quite pleased and appreciated with some information I shared with him from provided literature search."

> "I am using the literature to prepare the introduction for an article for publication for health resource planning decision making. It really helps to back up the approach with evidence & reported best practices."

Discussion

Web-based surveys can be a useful way to gather information on client satisfaction with, and use of, a literature search service. The open-ended feedback was more challenging to analyze but valuable to gather.

Results also helped to make the case that we need to work with IT to have that smooth and instant access to the full-text, thus affecting web development and collection development.

Besides demonstrating the value of this service to a health region, the survey results are influencing our ongoing quality improvement and evaluation efforts.

Next Steps

Since this survey was implemented, HINC has united with other hospital libraries in Alberta to form the provincial Knowledge Resource Service (KRS).

The results from this survey have helped inform two quality improvement surveys for this new unit:

1. **A revised literature search survey.** The new survey asks more specific questions about *how* the literature search was used, and whether the information had an impact on specific aspects of patient care, research, or quality improvement.

2. **A general library services survey.** This survey, which is distributed every two years, is designed in part to capture some of the more long-term impacts of services such as a literature search. We found that asking questions about the use and/or impact of a literature search only two weeks after it was complete was sometimes premature.

Client feedback gleaned from this survey is also useful for individuals who perform literature searches for clients. The value that clients place on information professionals' ability to find literature quickly and with precision influences our commitment to continuing professional development, which includes:

- Conducting an effective reference interview
- Searching grey literature
- Mastering the use of new databases/tools
- Understanding and promoting evidence based practice

Acknowledgements

Sian Wilson, former Student Assistant, Tom Baker Cancer Centre for assistance with data management and coding.

Contact Us

http://krs.albertahealthservices.ca
christie.hurrell@ucalgary.ca