

COLLABORATION AMONG SPANISH MEDICAL LIBRARIES*

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Introduction

Unlike other countries, in Spain the introduction of medical libraries throughout the whole country did not begin until the middle of the 20th century. Starting in the decade of the sixties, the National Health Institute carried out an ambitious programme in the creation of hospital centres. But these hospitals were conceived basically as medical care organisms. Only those hospitals of traditional or historical importance, such as the Hospital Clinic or Santa Creu i San Pau Hospital in Barcelona, San Carlos Hospital in Madrid or Marqués de Valdecilla Hospital in Santander had the benefit of medical libraries. In the seventies, a public health programme of hospital reorganisation was implemented, to provide for the training of full-time medical specialists. As a result of this, hospital libraries were set up in teaching hospitals as a support for both medical care and teaching activities.

In Spain there has been no tradition of special training for librarians (except in Catalonia, where the School for Librarians was set up in Barcelona in the first decade of the 20th century), nor is there a tradition of special libraries. Recognised university qualifications in Librarianship and Documentation were established in the eighties (3-years diploma) and in the nineties (5-years degree). Up until the present time, the existence or not of libraries in hospitals has always on the pressure of demand by doctors for the establishment of these services, and on the willingness of hospital management to implement them. The existing inequalities in the establishment of library services in centres of similar characteristics are due to the fact that they can be run by specially qualified professionals or by administrative staff. As a result there are obviously wide differences in staffing/funding and services, and for many years professionals have been pressing for the establishment of minimum standards for these libraries.

During the nineties, the Health Ministry developed a series of R+D (Research and Development) programmes in hospital centres (REUNI) which involved a

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movement of ascription of libraries to these units. Over the last few years, libraries have been developing as a support framework for medical care, teaching or research as independent units, without being part of the organisational structure or the hospital as a whole. The demand for standards is the channel through which this situation can be regularised and hospital libraries can achieve their rightful place as an established hospital service for medical care, teaching and research.

Meanwhile, some medical libraries, especially those from hospitals, decided to collaborate in order to improve the situation. In 1986 the first Meeting on information biomedical documentation was organised in Santander at the Marqués de Valdecilla Hospital, with the following objectives: to exchange experiences, to update knowledge, and to create a platform for future co-ordination projects and co-operation.

Since 1986 there have been eight editions of the National Congress of Information and Documentation in Health Sciences. The second Meeting took place in Barcelona in 1987. The third Meeting was in Sevilla in 1990 . The fourth Meeting, this time in Bilbao, was in 1992 . The subsequent Meeting were held in 1994 in Palma de Mallorca , in 1995 in Madrid, in 1997 in Granada, and in 1999 the 8th Meeting took place in Santiago de Compostela. All these congresses have been recognised as of scientific interest by the Spanish Health Authorities and each Congress was organised around these of current interest. The Meeting are an interdisciplinary event attended by all professionals involved in the field of information and documentation in health sciences (hospitals, medical schools, pharmacy faculties, research centres, etc).

This means that although there has been no institutional support al national level, libraries have been aware or the need to bring their profession up to date, as well as to create an environment in which to frame all professional aspects for their own initiatives.

To this end we have taken advantage of the political configuration of this country, which has provided professional librarians with a platform for the communication of experiences and the planning of services.

These meetings have helped to set up a human network of co-operation, which has given rise to the following landmarks:

1. Firstly, the elaboration of the C 17 Catalogue of publications and periodicals named after the 17 autonomous communities, which make up the Spanish State. Contributions were made by all the hospital and university libraries and related institutions, providing data and updating. This catalogue has been used to initiate interlibrary lean services and to supply users with the available information, and

also informs librarians of the resources of other centres. Nevertheless, although at the level of university libraries there is a network, REBIUN, and a standardised system of loans and charges, it has still not been possible to regularise and standardise this service among hospital libraries.

2. Secondly, the elaboration of a study of the situation of health sciences libraries: the current situation and future prospects. Published in 1998, brings together relevant data on the situation of these libraries and proposes a national system of bibliographic and documentary information in health sciences, called SINAPSIS, which has not received any support at institutional level.

What then is the current situation in Spain at the dawn of the twenty-first century? Spain is different in this too. It is the Spanish sunshine. With the incorporation of information and communication technology, the development of Internet and its integration into so-called traditional library procedures, various co-operative projects have emerged in Spain. All of them through autonomous communities and with institutional backing, which, notwithstanding all the above-mentioned precedents, and based on the development of digital or virtual libraries, aim to resolve this situation. At the present time, in several regions of Spain, health sciences libraries are working to develop different models and systems to share resources. Of these, we shall only give a brief mention. But we do wish to emphasise the important reduction in the annual budgets assigned to libraries for materials acquisition which has taken place over the last 10 years, and which has had a decisive influence on the need to share increasingly scant resources, as public spending in the area of R+D (research and development) has been reduced considerably.

In addition, another curious characteristic of these institutional projects, which we are referring to, is the fact that although they are based on the participation and the work of professional librarians, they are directed by doctors or by other technical professionals. Another characteristic is that none of these projects contemplates the co-ordination or internal co-operation between similar specialist libraries in other communities, or even with other libraries, such as those in universities.

Projects

We describe those projects, which seem to us the most interesting: The regions where these projects are being carried out are: Galicia, the Basque Country, Madrid and Catalonia and Andalucía. The Galicia Health Service (Servicio Galego de Saude- Sergas) has brought together 17 of the most important hospitals libraries in order to unify the following parameters:

Data base distribution

ISBD bibliographic description

Translation of medical subjects headings to index registers
Elaboration of guidelines

And purchase and setting-up of the Data Treck programme for the following tasks: cataloguing, lending, acquisitions, control of periodicals, and online catalogue. This idea first germinated in 1994, and has been functioning since January 1998.

In Catalonia, there are several projects under way, since this is a region of Spain where libraries have always been the most developed, and of these projects I am going to refer specifically to two which we consider the most interesting: The first is that of the Josep Laporte Library Foundation and the second is called Galenics. The Josep Laporte Foundation is a Consortium of the medical libraries with the following mission : To provide and offer information and knowledge, with the aim of facilitating in health professionals and users quality decision-making; To direct and fulfil present and future needs in information and knowledge of health professionals, teaching staff; students and users, by means of specific documentation strategies incorporating novel communication and information technologies, To promote the creation, retrieval, selection, classification, synthesis, integration, transfer and dissemination of knowledge in health and life science. It consists of:

A traditional Medical Library: the union of three existing medical libraries.

Teledocumentation centre.

A Digital Library: with a basic package including five bibliographic data bases, sixty journals with full text, and products based on evidence synthesis.

Secondly, and also in Catalonia, we have the Galenics project. This is a system for the retrieval and diffusion of information in the area of health, aimed at professionals. Galenics thus, becomes a useful system of communication and an important reference point for all those involved in this area.

The Galenics structure is as follows:

Institutionally Galenics is a foundation

Administratively Galenics is cofinanced synergically managed with a philosophy of consortium

Functionally is a Metaserver

Neutral node

Instrument for formation and training

Managed by Fundacio privada Galenics, through an agreement, any institution in the health area, can become members such as:

- Professional associations
- Hospitals
- Faculties
- University
- Publics and private health institutions

In the Madrid area we have the following project:

A Survey for Hospital Libraries in Madrid, was carried out in April 1999. The results of this survey provide up-to-date data on libraries and their resources, economic, human, and material.

The Knowledge of these resources has helped to evaluate and accept and an agreement for co-operation, set up within a legal framework, for hospital libraries in the Community of Madrid. This agreement will bring together these libraries as a consortium, which will enable them to continue working collectively, with statutes, which define and identify them, as well as regulating their collaboration.

In the Basque Country there is a co-operative project for the management of biomedical knowledge. In 1998 the General Direction of Osakidetza, (this is the name of Health System in the Basque Country) approved a project in order to increase the efficiency of information access and the potential to share experiences. The plan:design of electronic supply trough a co-operative network coordinated configuration of collections, integrated purchase of journals, books and databases, unified catalogue for own collection, electronic access catalogue.

In Andalucía, in 1999 the regional health Service (Consejería de Salud) started a project of consortium between health science libraries. The first step will be to carry out an exhaustive survey in order to know the real situation of the all health science libraries at the Community. The project includes the creation of a large Intranet who will allow common access to different data bases, electronic publications, and online catalogues.

The National Library of Health Sciences was created in Spain in 1996. The main projects of this institution at that moment are:

1. To guarantee, co-ordinate and maintain up to date the Spanish Collective Catalogue of Health Sciences Libraries C17.

2. Maintenance the WEB page of the Library with the following directories: Spanish medical publications, Health Sciences Libraries, Scientific Societies, Congress and workshops
3. To make a database that will cover all the Spanish bibliographic publications in Health Sciences that will become the IBECS (Spanish Bibliographic Index of Health Science)
4. Start with continuing education program for librarians
5. They have also a project of co-operation with the Iberoamerican Network BIREME

Discussion

If the situation until now has been disorganised and uncoordinated, it is our hope that these projects will contribute towards making use of the experience gained by the professionals involved, and will not further atomise and fragment an already disorganised and uncoordinated situation.

So, Spanish health sciences librarians are conscious of the need to provide a platform for professionals to come together and discuss the problems of information provision, access and management and develop new resources.

It is also necessary to improve the skills of librarians so that they can play an important role together with practitioners to adopt evidence-based approaches to health care and decision making.

The skills required to retrieve relevant and exhaustive information in clinical settings give librarians an excellent opportunity because they must play a major part in helping clinicians, researchers and health professionals in general to retrieve information under the best conditions.

Spanish health sciences librarians, also realise the importance of national information policies and governmental recognition to provide an effective network with legal and administrative bases for integrating a real national system of information in health sciences. In addition to this, the importance of continuing education for health sciences librarians to develop new systems and services for information retrieval, as well as the need for qualified librarians who are able to provide relevant information on health decision making.

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