Factors that influence the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines

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Abstract   This paper sought to identify the factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines. This paper dealt with the following questions: What facilitates or hinders the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a network? Is it feasible to establish such a network? Who will manage the network? What are the network's functions and services? What are the requirements to join this network? What are the governing policies and guidelines? The researcher sent survey questionnaires to heads of medical libraries who are members of the Medical and Health Librarians Association of the Philippines (MAHLAP) and/or the Association of Philippine Medical Colleges (APMC). After the initial survey, the researcher conducted focus group discussions (FGD) participated by the MAHLAP 2010 Board of Officers. The researcher also interviewed networking experts and heads of medical institutions to obtain their opinion and suggestions on network establishment. Frequency analysis was used to count preferences of librarians regarding the facilitating and hindering factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries. The study revealed that the key factors affecting the establishment of a network include administrative support and budget to address hindrances such as networking costs and other requirements for joining a network. Attaining these key factors directs the readiness of medical librarians and libraries to establish a medical library network. The researcher recommends that potential member libraries sit down and further discuss the establishment of a network of medical libraries. MAHLAP should take the initiative to convene its members and present to them draft policies and guidelines. Once discussed, this can be submitted to APMC for the leaders of institutions review and approval.
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Introduction

Medical libraries in the Philippines are faced with the challenges of acquiring and maintaining sufficient resources for their users. Common problems among them are budget instability and increasing prices of medical resources. Solutions to these problems are being explored and discussed during conferences/dialogs among medical

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librarians. Medical librarians are enthusiastically finding ways to cope and provide services even with limited information and manpower resources. One of the solutions raised during an FGD in one of MAHLAP's congresses was to establish a network for sharing resources and expertise which can save costs.

Rouse and Rouse (1980) cited a definition from the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science that states a network is "two or more libraries and/or other organizations engaged in a common pattern of information exchange, through communications, for some functional purpose. A network usually consists of a formal arrangement whereby materials, information, and services provided by a variety of libraries and/or other organizations are made available to all potential users" (NCLIS, 1975, pp. 82—83).

Benefits that will facilitate network establishment

Networking has already been known to have significant effects on libraries and information resource sharing. Ernst (1977) said that "it has been finally recognized that no single library can provide complete and universal service, but it may just be possible, though not probable, that this ideal might be approached through joint and concerted effort" (Ernst, 1977, pp. 171—181). An information network can facilitate resource sharing; shared cataloging; ownership of bibliographic data; access to jointly-owned, centralized databases; control of the technological destiny of the library and the profession; and cooperative preservation (Martin, 1988, pp. 131—141). Todaro (2005) also presented a number of library benefits: maximize resources; economize; solve a problem; make money; indicate worth of services within an environment; provide good/better customer service; create an information literate community; meet a need; change an image; create a need; do a good deed; provide access to information, resources, buildings, services and experts; serve the underserved; and build communities.

Issues that may hinder network establishment

While it is evident that networks have positive impacts on libraries, Todaro (2005) still identified a number of failure elements. If there is lack of clarity or misunderstanding with the goals and objectives, a network will not work. Some libraries also have turf concerns and fear of losing their identities while others dislike change. Some are concerned about the time and money that they need to commit. If these apprehensions are present and remained unsolved, benefits of the network will not be realized.

There are other things that might cause negative perceptions about networking. Some may think that networking may just be additional work and some may feel that they can offer more but might gain less. Others may even feel that they can survive without having to join a network. On the other hand, some librarians, according to Ernst (1977), believed that "they and their libraries have nothing to contribute because of their smallness, and, perhaps, because of their very specialized nature and,

therefore, limited purpose and collection" (Ernst, 1977, pp. 171—181).

Research questions

Recognizing that a network can improve access to information and sharing of library resources, as articulated in dialogs initiated by associations like APMC and MAHLAP, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. What facilitates or hinders the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a network?
3. Is it feasible to establish such a network?
4. Who will manage the network?
5. What are the network's functions and services?
6. What are the requirements to join this network? What are the governing policies and guidelines?

Objectives of the study

Based on previous studies that present positive and negative elements of having a network, this paper surveyed librarians who are members of MAHLAP and/or APMC. The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the facilitating and hindering factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines;
2. To identify the advantages and disadvantages of having a network of medical libraries;
3. To determine the expected network's management system;
4. To identify the network's functions and services;
5. To recommend policies and guidelines for the establishment and sustainability of a network of medical libraries; and
6. To determine the requirements and responsibilities of a network member.

Significance of the study

The results of this study will provide librarians, specifically, medical librarians a better perspective on how to establish a network. For prospective network members, the result of the study will help them re-assess their libraries' collection, technological infrastructure, and services; and to enable them to gauge their qualifications to join a library network. For medical librarians, their understanding of the need for a network of medical libraries will be modified; and hopefully reduce, if not remove, the hindering factors that affect their cooperation.

Methodology

The researcher sent a survey questionnaire to leaders of medical libraries who are members of MAHLAP and/or APMC.