Virtual Issue Editorial – June 2018

***Innovation, engagement and development: moving forward in health information settings***

Abstract

The current trends influencing change in health information and library settings are presenting some exciting new opportunities for health information specialists. Increasingly, knowledge specialists are playing a pivotal role in the effective mobilisation of knowledge and evidence. The focus for our profession will continue to be on demonstrating the value and impact of our services, but a shift in expectations about how those services are delivered will need to be underpinned by new tools and skill sets. These issues are reflected in the themes of the Health Libraries Group (HLG) 2018 conference, and in conjunction with the event, this virtual issue draws together a collection of articles reflecting those themes. Topics covered in the virtual issue include: Toolkits, online systems and emergent technologies to support health information practice; Continuing professional development; Community projects, engagement, outreach and public health; Value and impact and evidence-based practice; Service improvement and library management; and, Digital and health literacy. The papers selected for this issue provide some excellent examples of how we, as a profession are initiating change in creative ways and rising to the exciting challenges of the future.

Editorial

In conjunction with the Health Libraries Group 2018 conference, it is a pleasure to present a brand new virtual issue of the Health Information and Libraries Journal. This year, the issue draws together a collection of articles written by authors from around the world, recently published in the journal that particularly reflect the themes of the HLG conference. Together, these themes cover a range of topics including: Toolkits, online systems and emergent technologies to support health information practice; Continuing professional development; Community projects, engagement, outreach and public health; Value and impact and evidence-based practice; Service improvement and library management; and, Digital and health literacy.

Health information and library services are both accustomed and responsive to change, and alongside the inevitable challenges, the current trends influencing change are presenting some exciting opportunities for health information specialists. Health Education England for instance, is steering a new course of NHS library and knowledge services, with knowledge specialists playing a pivotal role in the effective mobilisation of knowledge and evidence. For health information specialists globally, our focus will continue to be on demonstrating the value and impact of our services, but a shift in expectations about how those services are delivered will need to be underpinned by new tools and skill sets. Service improvement and library management will require enhanced online systems and the use of emergent technologies and toolkits to support practice and increasingly, health information professionals will engage more in community projects, outreach and public health related activities. Linked to this will be the role they will play in supporting health and digital literacy, an issue that is currently high on the national agenda for the UK, and of global importance. Creative approaches to continuing professional development to support evidence-based practice will also continue to be a marked feature of our role. All these issues appear prominently within the conference themes of HLG this year, and Bryant et al bring them together symbiotically in their informative paper written for the March 2018 International Perspectives and Initiatives regular feature and selected for inclusion in this virtual issue. In this paper they focus specifically on the Knowledge for Healthcare initiative and aspects of its implementation. They identify the embedding of knowledge services into the work life of health professionals and capitalising on technological changes as key to the success of Health Education England’s five year forward view, together with the increased engagement health information professionals will have with patients, carers, and the public and the need to deliver services that are reflective of this. Their paper provides both an insightful overview and practical toolkit for to use in taking forward and implementing the changes necessary to succeed.

Service transformation, role redesign, and getting evidence into practice is also the focus of Davies et al (2017) who present the view from Scotland in their 2017 research paper introducing a new Knowledge into Action (K2A) model developed to support the transformation of healthcare across NHS Scotland. They present a series of stages which identify the key role a network of knowledge brokers can play in mobilising knowledge in healthcare services, and highlight that the delivery of the K2A model also requires the relevant tools and technologies to be successful in better supporting the use of evidence in healthcare practice.

In considering the increased focus of technology in professional practice, smart technologies have particular relevance to our practice. As we move to an environment in which health information is predominantly digital in nature and accessed by health care professionals whilst on the move, we have seen a rise in the use of mobile technologies such as the smartphone in healthcare settings. Our virtual issue this year includes a research paper by Iran based authors Tahamtan et al (2017) who present some interesting findings and a useful overview for health information specialists in helping them understand what factors influence the adoption of smartphones to access information in medical settings. Given the wealth of high quality digital information now accessible via smartphone, the authors stress that librarians have a key role in motivating health care professionals to use these technologies to support clinical work. This paper provides valuable insights for librarians in understanding more effectively the characteristics of their users when it comes to smartphone use in clinical practice.

As health information specialists progressively move towards involvement in public health related activities, understanding how consumers access health information within a digital environment is also of key relevance to our changing profession. Health information seeking plays an increasingly important role in users’ online activities and the review article selected for this virtual issue by Milwaukee based authors Zhao and Zang (2017) discusses the role social media has played in consumer information-seeking processes and presents a narrative on the potential benefits and concerns of this. Along a similar theme, digital health literacy is explored by Cunningham and Johnson (2016) within our paper selected for the Dissertations into Practice regular feature. Focussing on one popular consumer health information web site, this paper presents the findings of a study into how people evaluate online health information. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on health information behaviour but also supports the important work health information providers do in encouraging users of online health information to evaluate and assess the trustworthiness of content. Together, these two papers provide important insight for health information professionals involved in the design of consumer health information web sites. Indeed, with the increased awareness of health literacy in society, the effective communication of health information is crucial in improving public health. To this end, our virtual issue this year also includes a fascinating research paper by Sarah McNicol (2017) based at Manchester Metropolitan University who explores the value and potential of comics as a format for communicating health information. The study considers the use and effectiveness of comics in a variety of health settings and with different patient groups and health conditions. McNicol advises that health information professionals are well positioned to help improve awareness of, and access to health comics as an alternative, and potentially very effective medium for communicating important health information.

And lastly, whilst there is a changing emphasis in the activities health information and library professionals need to be engaged with to deliver effective services, some core skills continue to remain crucial to our business. Supporting health professionals to develop skills in evidence-based practice is one of these. In the context of continuing professional development, interdisciplinary collaboration can provide a dynamic vehicle for the effective delivery and supporting of skills development. Bringing together the clinical skills and knowledge of health care practitioners with the information skills librarians have for evidence-based practice can be a powerful combination within a learning environment. Some excellent examples of how effective this can be are presented in two papers featuring in this virtual issue. Johnson et al (2017) focus on exactly this when describing their NExT (Nursing Experts: Translating the Evidence) project. This paper outlines ways in which public health nurse educators and health sciences librarians in Illinois have collaborated to develop, deliver and evaluate an educational intervention focussed on supporting public health nurses to develop their skills in evidence-based practice. Within the Teaching and Learning in Action regular feature of the virtual issue, a further example of collaborative partnership between health care professionals and clinical librarians in delivering CPD is provided by Lawton, Manning and Lawler (2017), a group of librarians at health service institutions in Ireland. As health information professionals increasingly begin to move their physical presence away from the library and into the community through outreach projects and other related activities, these authors discuss CPD in the context of delivery at a conference attended by health and social care professionals. This alternative approach of taking an evidence-based practice skills workshop to a CPD conference for health professionals provides another fascinating example of alternative approaches and innovative ways in which CPD can be delivered for maximum impact, and from which our profession can learn a great deal.

And so, coming a full circle and returning to the first paper introduced in this virtual issue, Bryant et al (2018, p1) optimistically state that, ‘there is a bright future for health information specialists in which their expertise will be used to mobilise evidence, manage and share knowledge, support patients, carers and families, optimise technology and social media and provide a keystone for improved patient care and safety’. The papers selected for this issue provide some excellent examples of how we, as a profession, are addressing these issues, initiating change in creative ways and rising to the exciting challenges of the future. For our profession to realise it’s full potential innovation, engagement, and development are the buzzwords and moving forward is the focus.

Dr Hannah Spring

Editor: Teaching and Learning in Action regular feature

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