

Conclusion

A big question on a lot of peoples' lips is "What will happen to medical libraries in the post-Google world?"³ The answer, in our minds: Step up to the plate, accept these challenges and go with the flow. "Librarians rock, Let's shrug off our "clothes" and get into the new gear of the future!

"The best librarians, meanwhile, know that their business teems with ambivalence and shifting roles for their institution and their profession. To keep up and to anticipate what will come next, they have to learn as a lifelong professional activity" .⁷

In future health information specialists will have quite different roles and responsibilities, even partaking in course and curricula design and development.⁸ So, are we ready for the future?

From naked librarian to formidable information force!

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Christelle Steyn
Email: christelle.steyn@up.ac.za
+27 12 354 1433

Janice De Wee
Email: janice.dewee@up.ac.za
+27 12 319 2422



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

The Naked Librarian

"The only constant is change, continuing change, inevitable change that is the dominant factor in society today.

- Isaac Asimov¹

Christelle Steyn & Janice De Wee

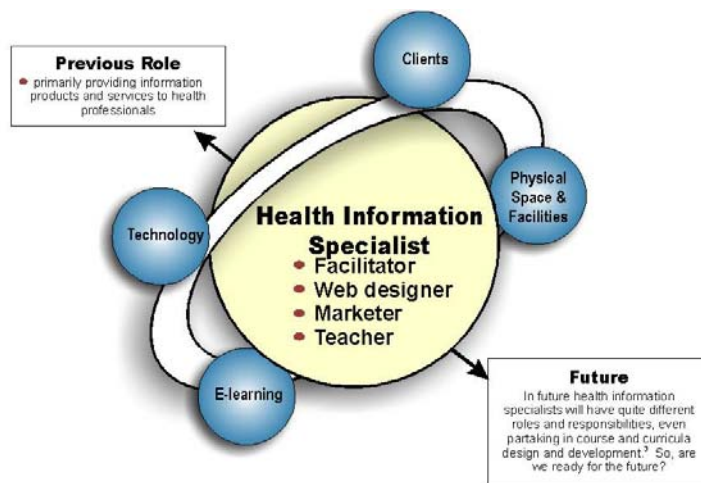
The Changing Role & Environment of the Health Information Specialist – South African Perspective

In the changing information environment, it is crucial for us as Health Information Specialists, to be able to adapt daily. This presents our profession with many challenges and opportunities and requires us to constantly re-evaluate our roles and environment, in order to best satisfy the information needs of our clients.

The physician, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote: "Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions".² This illustrates that the role of the Health Information Specialist should be flexible and adaptable.

Health information professionals have to envision the future and plan from there. We need to get rid of outdated ideas and revolutionize our way of thinking. Shrugging off the old coat of the stereotypical librarian, we must start off in our envisioned future.

From "naked librarians" to brand new and evolving.



The previous primary role of the health sciences information specialist has been the provision of information products and services to health professionals. This role has evolved to include being facilitator, web designer, marketer and teacher.

Library clients expect easy, fast access to products and services, from remote locations.³ They demand instant gratification, simplicity and a central access point.⁴

The advances in technology, and the expanding virtual collection is growing at record breaking speed, but is still not enough to satisfy the need for "one stop" access.

Digitization and preservation of materials are one of the key focus areas, to make information even easier to find.

With a larger virtual collection, less physical space is used. Thus there is more space for students and computers.

So despite more electronic information being available, the library as a physical place is still highly in demand.³

Physical facilities can be revamped into virtual computer spaces, where users can be accommodated with laptops, wireless access, etc.

We should make more use of equipment like PDA's, Ipods etc and invest in the M-learning concept.

"Librarians have a vital role in teaching users to identify, evaluate and use information efficiently and effectively, and to become self-supporting information seekers".⁵

In our South African context it is an ideal to deliver training materials in as many of the 11 official languages as possible.

This is vital to optimal information literacy and e-learning for all clients. Use of Web 2.0 tools and Blackboard / WebCT in e-learning are essential.

All the elements in the model influence each other and in turn they all effect our role. We need to promote all these elements, as well as our new role, in order for our clients to be aware and optimally use our products and services.

Our future depends on how well we adapt. "Combine librarians and the net, and in no time they will rule the world".⁶