"Need Health Info? Assessing Trustworthy Health Info Online in NW Montana"

Express Outreach Award (2005-2006)

Kalispell Regional Medical Center
Medical Library
Kalispell, Montana, USA

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Summary/Introduction:

Obtained a portable computer training lab consisting of 7 laptop computers, digital video projector, associated peripherals, and carrying cases. Also obtained "Hercules pens" to promote the availability of where people can go locally for assistance on retrieving trustworthy health information with the assistance of trained "health information providers."

The lab was completed and all ready to go as of January 25, 2006. The lab is starting to be used for various training sessions in and around the Flathead Valley, Montana.

Geographically, this project impacted both residents and visitors to the communities of Flathead County, Lincoln County, and Lake County, all in northwestern Montana. On one instance, part of the lab was taken to a training session held in Helena, Montana.

Current collaborators include Kalispell Regional Medical Center (Medical Library and Cancer Center), North Valley Hospital, Flathead City-County Health Department, Flathead County Library and their branches, Flathead Valley Community College Library. In the near future, collaboration will expand to the Lincoln County Public Library system, and possibly St. John's Hospital.

Collaborations with the Flathead High School Library came to a stand-still after repeated attempts to keep them involved. The librarians at the high school became bombarded for their time due to a new additional high school being built and a pending review of their curriculum for continued funding status. In the meantime, they already have a computer training lab in place at the old high school, and will obtain additional equipment for the new high school, with the advent of a state-of-the-art technology lab.

The only "hardship" I had with the collaborations was the conflict of scheduling the laptop lab. It was decided to have the Flathead County Library be the home-base for the laptop lab. A conflict occurred for scheduling of the lab on the same day by two different organizations – one being the Flathead County Library and the other being the Flathead City-County Health Department. Because the lab was not used for a direct "health-information related training" at the public library, it was stressed that the stronger priority was to go to the health department's training of physician offices for immunization records access. During this communication break-down it was agreed by all parties that the calendar located in the Director's office at the Flathead County Library will serve as the laptop lab scheduler.

Current collaborations are continuing their open communications on an as needed basis. More training sessions are being planned out for the rest of the year by all the collaborating organizations.

Some of the other local libraries had their own needs assessment surveys from their respective service populations, and we used those to discuss the need for a portable laptop lab. The attendance at the recent classes, and the number of those registered for future classes demonstrates that there was a need for this laptop lab. And having a lab locally enables the libraries to offer more classes, more frequently.

We are consistently obtaining verbal feedback of the helpfulness of the classes and the flexibility of the times, and the ease of use on the computers.

Technology support has been embraced by the Flathead County Library, in exchange for their "home-base status" of the lab. An additional bag and two extra light bulbs for the digital projector were already purchased out of the funding award funds. Because the public library has already figured out that they

can't live without the lab, I'm confident it will be sustained. They've already talked about adding more laptops to the lab; therefore, they'll fund the extra requirements in keeping a running lab. I have approval for small purchases as needed out of the medical library's budget. The City-County Health Department and the Public Library are supported by the same Information Technology system of the county, and thus will have extra support from them as well.

Training/Exhibits Conducted:

(Because the lap was not completed until January 2006, training opportunities were missed in September-December. The trainings in Sept did not use the labtop lab.)

Sep 8, 12, 13, 15, 20, 2006 – North Valley Hospital – library volunteers
             "Consumer Health Reference Service"
        (Provided a list of resources and practiced scenarios for handling consumer health questions.)

Feb 13, 2006 – Brendan House (long-term care wing of the Kalispell Regional Medical Center)
             "Accessing Your Libraries"
        (Enabled both Brendan House staff and computer-savvy residents to have access to reading materials from the various libraries without having to leave the facility, nor rely on a family member to get their materials. Not all was health-related, some was used for personal reading items – but improved morale of the patients by empowering them to choose first-hand what they wanted, in large print, etc. This was made possible by the local public library enabling remote access to requesting materials on behalf of Brendan House. Continued the service by obtaining music recordings for Alzheimers and other dementia patients – showing a lot of excitement by "connecting" with these patients. (Music is the last to go in dementia – many of these patients respond to music even if they do not respond to other stimuli. As the patients are varied in their music preferences, the varied selections of music items are now available without purchase from the public library to Brendan House staff & residents. With the flexibility of a wide variety of resources, they're able to "reach" more patients.)

Feb 27, 2006 – North Valley Hospital – Auxiliary Luncheon
             "Where to Find Medical Information"
        (Review about medical libraries – where, what, and why. Enabled the audience to be more aware of the services available from the two local medical libraries and allowed for passing the information along to other community members about medical libraries in the hopes of increased usage. Also enabled those who were interested to have some hands-on experience using a computer. (Specifically used MedlinePlus for the hands-on demonstrations.)

March 16, 2006 – Summit Fitness Center; Community Health Promotions
             "Finding Reputable Health Information on the Internet"
        (Enabled the audience to obtain a list of useful health websites, how to verify the website's validity, obtained some tips on successful searching, and how to verify rumors. Demonstrated MedlinePlus. Also briefly talked about the differences between physician and consumer languages, ie "MedSpeak".)

Plans for Continuing Efforts –

There is definite interest in continuing to use the laptop lab with the advent of increasing need for technology training; ie, more and more people are being referred to information available online. With a brand-new, ongoing "computer comfort" class held at the public libraries, more people are embracing the use of computers and are subsequently using computers to retrieve health information.

As the word of the availability of the portable laptop lab is getting around, we're starting to field calls from various health-related disciplines asking if they can use the lab for their outreach projects. One example was the call from the hospital's nutrition services department wondering if they could use the lab to teach where people can find "heart-healthy" recipes. The Training Center inquired about using the lab to train CPR instructors (those instructors go out in the community to provide training.) A professor from the college inquired about using the lab to teach patient education resources to the students in the Medical Assistants class. (Tentatively planned - no official date has been set yet.)

Future Scheduled uses of laptop lab:

April 4th and ongoing; Flathead City-County Health Department
      "State Web-based Immunization Records Training"
  (training physicians from each medical office on the integrated system that tracks their pediatric patients' immunization records. Covers all pediatric patients within the state of Montana – ie, if a patient moves from Billings to Libby, the family does not need to keep track of paper-based immunization records – the physician will have access to the web-based version. Covers all of Montana.)

4 sessions in April and 1 in May;   Flathead County Library – Kalispell branch
      "Computer Comfort"
  (Familiarize students with basic operation and uses of computers; give them time to enhance skills in computers; help them understand the buzzwords in the news and in conversations.
Length of class: 1hour Estimated attendance (if possible): 8 at each session.) –
Note; MedlinePlus will be mentioned as a website for health information.

Original project goals and objectives met? If not, why not?
Yes, the original project goals were met. I had envisioned that for part of the "down-time" the computers were to be used as "Medical Information Stations" and we haven't had a lull in the scheduled use at this time. My expectations were exceeded by the enthusiastic adoption and initial usage of the lab.

Significant lessons learned?
Reaching out to collaborate with others in your area opens up a whole new world of ideas. It also enables better relationships among your library with others in the community. You will obtain an increased understanding of the missions and values of these other organizations you're reaching out to, and subsequently see connections between your services and their needs. Talking, listening and leaving lines of communications open results in new, positive, ongoing relationships. You should consistently provide "touch-bases" with these organizations. For our purposes, email correspondence worked the best for these "touch-base" communications. Once you remind them of your services; delineating clearly how your services match and fulfill their needs, they will certainly think of you for future opportunities. Also, listen for clues to the collaborating organizations outreach efforts – many times they're reaching out to other organizations that you may never have considered previously.

If you were to start all over again, what , if anything, would you change?
I would change my approach to relying on vendors' price quotes regardless if they're written – in the initial stages of implementing this project, I was quoted a price by the vendors and based my pricing scheme on their quote (with a small buffer.) However, the vendor came back to me with a much higher price and was unyielding to keep to a minimum increase from his previous quote. I feared that we would not be able to complete this project. I confided to a few librarian friends about my dilemma; a few weeks later a friend at the Montana State Library informed me about a consultant wanting to sell his laptop lab he used to train the public librarians. Serendipidity!

What I would do differently is be more willing to post to the library community as a whole about these kinds of dilemmas so that there's more of a chance to reach someone. Also, I would obtain quotes from more than one vendor, even if they're not in a convenient location.

The only other thing I would change is my timeline of the project. I was somewhat dismayed at how long it took for the hospital to obtain the new equipment orders.

Advice or recommendation would you give to anyone considering a similar outreach effort?
First of all, if you're considering an outreach project, you must dedicate time to this project. You will be dedicating time to others in your community. The rewards are plentiful, however, having the support of your organization will enable a successful outreach. First of all, review with your institution if they will support you in your outreach efforts.

Have a means of consistent "touch-base" communications on a regular basis, ie every 5[h] Tuesday, either by telephone or by email, whichever is easiest for you. Then be prepared to listen and find ways to make that connection between what they want and what you can provide, reasonably. Always keep an open mind – you will be exposed to new ideas, even when you've already heard their request before. If they're starting to ask of you the same thing you've always been asked before, why not pretend that you hadn't heard that request, and brainstorm ways to fulfill that request? Even if you eventually determine that your library can't provide the requested service, you can always think of other organizations that can provide this type of service and subsequently create a new collaboration.