

Introduction

What is an Informationist?

- A specialized librarian trained in information resources and services as well as one or more clinical/biomedical research areas.
- The concept originated in a 2000 editorial in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. This described a new paradigm in which physicians would delegate their information needs to the informationists, just as they submit pharmacy orders to pharmacists and x-ray orders to radiologists.
- Currently, informationists are visible in a variety of clinical and laboratory research settings and are integrated members of their research teams.

What is the purpose of this pilot study?

- Assess the impact of the informationist program on NIH research.
- Learn more about the roles the NIH informationists play in their groups.



Informationist with a team on clinical rounds

The NIH Library Informationist model allows librarians to work closely with users in their research or clinical specialties to make sure information needs are met and users are trained and educated to incorporate scholarly information into their professional work.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our interviewees for taking the time to talk with us, our fellow informationists for telling us about their activities, Prof. Joan Ash (OHSU) for her guidance on qualitative research methods, and Suzanne Grefsheim and Susan Whitmore for their continued guidance and support of our research projects.

Methods

Rationale for the qualitative research approach in this study:

- Well suited to exploratory research because it has few *a priori* assumptions or hypotheses.
- Results can be used to build foundation for further research, which may be quantitative.
- Strong tradition already exists within both library and health care research.
- Complements quantitative data already collected by the library.

Two formats used to collect data

1 - Key Informant Interviews

- Subjects: Six heavy users of informationist services.
- Interviews conducted by an interviewer and an observer.
- Each informant responded to 7 questions. Additional questions were asked to encourage clarification or elaboration.

ID #	Degree	Sex	Title
1	PhD, RN	F	Clinical nurse scientist
2	PhD	M	Lab chief
3	MD	M	Unit head
4	MD	M	Consult service director
5	MD	M	Branch chief
6	MD	F	Staff clinician

Table 1. Subject characteristics

What has the informationist done for you lately?
 What is the value of having an informationist?
 How would you have obtained the information you needed without an informationist?
 Give an example of how an informationist has helped you.
 In what environment has an informationist helped you?
 Do you use the library more/less now that you have an informationist?
 What additional roles do you see for the informationist?

Table 2. Interview Questions

2 - Critical incident reporting

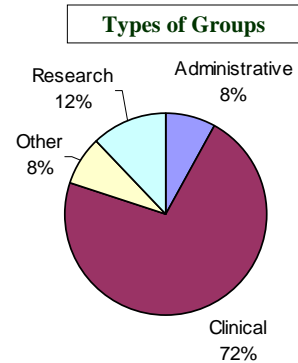
- Informationists were asked to report on patron interactions that indicated how services were valued.
- An online reporting system was developed so that incidents could be reported easily and anonymously.
- Collected data included type of group being served, location of interaction, service rendered, and patron's response.
- 25 incidents have been reported so far – project is ongoing.

Analysis

- A qualitative research approach with grounded theory methodology was utilized.
- Major themes of 'informationist impact' were synthesized from interviews and critical incident reports.

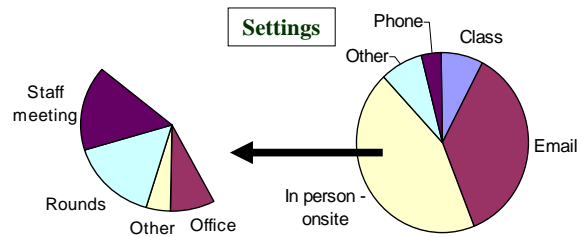
Results

1. Informationists work with a variety of people and groups, in a variety of settings.



Patrons' Titles

- Principal Investigators
- Study Coordinators
- Fellows
- Co-investigators
- Staff Nurses & Physicians
- Nutritionists
- Data Managers
- Consultation Services
- Residents
- Pharmacists
- Social Workers
- Occupational Therapists
- Grants Program Directors
- FAES Instructors
- Lab Directors



Conclusions

Patrons and informationists described several aspects of their interactions that help us understand why patrons appreciate the program. Chief among these aspects are:

- Informationists save researchers time.
- Informationists add librarian skills to research teams.
- Informationists provide on-the-spot training.

2. Informationists play a variety of roles in their groups.

Roles	Representative Quotations from Key Informant Interviews	Representative Activities Cited by Informationists
Skills of Informationist		
Bibliographic expert	"Just using tools and giving them to the biologist isn't really working. Critical reading of literature is something that not every graduate student, although they should, is experienced in." "It's been very helpful, very valuable to have someone with her expertise."	Literature searches Troubleshoot problems with patrons' searches
Portal to unfamiliar resources	"In my mind she's a resource, a go-to person. So if I need something and she can't do it, she'll let me know how I can do it." "I view the informationist service as a pathway to a variety of resources and to different perspectives."	Use databases other than PubMed to find information for patrons Research and identify alternatives to contracted services (save money)
Impact of Informationist		
Time-saver	"That's her expertise, is how to get information and get the right information and get it in a way that's not onerous, you know, where it takes you forever and a day." "I don't have time, I don't want to spend the time trying to learn how to set up these [alerts] myself.... It's a waste of my time."	Find new, easier, or faster ways of finding information Research software package that lab was considering buying
Trainer	His "willingness to take on programs and learn them has been immensely valuable. ... He taught other people in our group about Ingenuity [software]. We referred [clinical] researchers to him for training." "It would be more work staying up-to-date without the informationist service."	Teach tips and tricks for PubMed and other databases Participate in orientations for new fellows
Library interface	"I do less and less, I just ask [the informationist]." "[N]urses are using library resources more as a result of informationist contact." "I am using the library more through [the informationist]."	List relevant books in library's collection Troubleshoot access to online resources
Perceptions of Informationist		
Teammate	The informationist, "being a nurse herself and getting the lay of the land in the clinical areas, she goes to them and sits down with them at their computer ... She asks them questions and gets information there, logged in on their computer, so it's always right there." "It would be much less efficient [without the informationist], dealing with somebody that doesn't know how our team functions and what are the major issues involved."	Attend rounds to provide information to support research and/or patient care, as well as learn more about the science Invited to IC picnic

Continued Research

Many of the skills and benefits of informationists are shared with other librarians. The difference is that informationists develop long-term familiarity with a group of researchers, thus catalyzing the usual information seeking process. As we continue our exploratory research, we will be considering questions to ask in more detail in future studies, such as:

- What elements contribute to researchers accepting informationists as teammates?
- How much does biomedical training contribute to informationists' information skills and/or acceptance by researchers?
- Can the time saved by informationists be estimated or monetized?