Hospital Librarianship: What’s The New Normal?

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As a hospital librarian, I was optimistic that 2020 would be the end of COVID-19. 2021 has turned me into a pessimist. But, that is probably because I am starting to think more about what hospital librarianship will look like post-pandemic. Thus, it may be time to rethink the role of the clinical librarian. In the article, 2021 Clinical Librarians – A Call to Re-Think & Re-Invent!¹, Elaine Alligood advocates, especially for solo librarians, to go beyond the current essential duties and to think about innovation, reinventing, and reinforcing the partnership with clinical librarians and clinicians. The article also offers starting points for concepts, strategies, and ideas to engage leadership and encourage the inclusion of clinical librarians.

So, what does the future look like? Stepping out of the library and focusing on visibility through outreach, attending non-LIS conferences, engaging with library supporters, and networking with those that have little to no awareness about the existence of the library. As a new librarian, I connected with executives to conduct “sensing sessions” to introduce myself, promote the library, and collaborate on future projects. However, this was short-lived due to the pandemic. Recently while working on expanding our digital collection of health equity and diversity resources, I received feedback that many clinicians and administrative staff have not visited or reached out to the library. It’s as if our existence is obsolete simply because hospital staff are not aware of the library or the resources they have access to.

Working remotely also adds to non-visibility. However, librarians can find ways to promote themselves in a digital environment. For our system, we can post news and updates on the intranet where we have shared information about new resources, events and activities happening at the hospital while promoting the library and its resources, and just general library or staff updates. It’s also a good time to reach out to and connect with departments and encourage them to share information about the library in their newsletters or meetings.

Just like many others, I have been anxious and questioned the future of the physical library space. With the second surge of COVID-19, clinicians are more engaged with the increasing caseload. Is that why they do not frequent the library space as they used to? Or have clinicians become more reliant and comfortable with an online system for the library? Personally, I’ve been more productive, and the transition could be an effective and efficient model to be more proactive as a hospital librarian. Aside from my own experience, here are other experiences shared on the BMJ Insider Quarterly eNewsletter: