Research engagement in health librarianship: outcomes of a focus group

24th July 2014
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Background and Rationale

• The things we know:

• Research engagement in librarianship has been the focus of considerable professional debate for over three decades involving many fields of librarianship

• The role of research is an underpinning factor in evidence-based practice

• The role of the health librarian is fundamentally associated with the process of evidence-based healthcare
Background and Rationale

- Influence of evidence-based practice in health librarianship comes from proliferation in evidence-based healthcare

- Health library services have an impact on the outcomes of patient care

- There is a fundamental relationship between the two

- External and internal pressures to demonstrate service value
Background and Rationale

• Health librarians are acutely conscious that their work should have a positive impact on the outcomes of patient care

• Arguably, demonstration of this is needed through research activity
Background and Rationale

• Calls in literature for an increase in the practice of evidence-based librarianship (Brettle et al, 2011; Hall 2010)

• Health librarianship is a research emergent profession
  • Still quite young and underdeveloped in terms of the evidence base

• Low levels of research engagement in health librarianship
Challenges for research engagement

• Why is the evidence base in health librarianship slow to populate?

• Health librarians have frequently reported experiencing barriers to research engagement (Brice & Booth, 2005; Eve & Schenk, 2006; Hall, 2010; McNicol & Nankivell, 2003; Pretty, 2007)

• Anecdotal evidence identifies a number of challenges
Challenges for research engagement

• Common barriers perceived:
  • Lack of time and other resources
  • Lack of organisational support
  • Poorly organised research agenda / lack of leadership
  • Low levels of research related skills and confidence
  • LIS community does not regard itself as a research oriented profession so does not prioritise research
  • Complaints that existing research does not have relevance or applicability to real-world situations

• Some small pockets of good practice but generally there is a noted lack of rigour in much of the existing evidence base
Challenges for research engagement

• Much anecdotal and editorial based commentary on poor research engagement in HLIS, but a much smaller pool of systematic and robust research examining the subject

• What does exist is generic which weakens the impact and applicability to HLIS

• Commonalities exist at an international level, but structural and cultural contexts are different from the UK
Background and Rationale

• To date, there have been no studies that examine issues of research engagement exclusively within the context of health librarianship

• Health librarians work in a diverse range of settings

• Existing research is generic in nature
• It is arguable that different sectors should be studied separately
Study Aims

• This research set out to answer the question:
  • What are the barriers to and priorities for research engagement in health librarianship?

• Study design: A focus group aiming to gain consensus agreement from health LIS practitioners in relation to:
  • the top five barriers they perceived to engagement in research UK health librarianship
  • the top five priorities for research engagement in UK health librarianship
  • questioning to ask a wider health LIS audience and inform development of a related survey
Methodology

• Use of focus groups as a methodology in LIS is largely centred on service evaluation
  • Little used for purposes of profession specific self-reflection

• Good methodological practice in development of research instruments (Asbury, 1995; Barbour, 2007; McLeod, Meagher, Steinert, & Boudreau, 2000; O'Brien, 1993)

• Effective in formulating contextually relevant questions to ask wider population (Barbour, 2007; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; McLeod et al., 2000; Williams, 2003)
Methodology

• Improves content validity

• New approach to investigating the topic area
Approach to sampling

- Seven categories of health librarian identified for purposes of the study
  - Academic health librarians
  - Clinical librarians (NHS)
  - Health library service managers
  - Independent health librarians (non-NHS)
  - Research librarians (in health)
  - Strategic health library managers
  - Senior information strategy managers (in health)

- Purposive sample

- Wanted as wide a representation of HLIS as possible
Approach to Sampling

• Heterogeneity (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995)

• Homogeneity (Krueger and Casey, 2000)

• Focus group had characteristics from both theoretical frameworks
  • Homogeneous in that participants were all associated with HLIS
  • Heterogeneous in that participants came from a wide variety of HLIS settings
Running the Focus Group

• Participants purposefully not given a prior definition of research to work with during sessions

• Five minute exercise at the start of the session
  • Identify priorities and barriers from personal perspective

• Two groups and two questions:
  • What are the barriers to research engagement in health librarianship?
  • What are the priorities for research engagement in health librarianship?
Running the Focus Group

• Each group was attended by a member of the research team

• To minimise bias each group nominated a Chair

• Sessions were led by the Chair rather than the facilitator (research team member)

• Allowed discussion to flow from the participants rather than research facilitator

• Sessions too long to tape record. Independent scribes used to capture key points as directed by the group
Running the Focus Group

Group 1: Discuss barriers and priorities to research engagement (30 minutes)

Group 2: Discuss barriers and priorities to research engagement (30 minutes)

Group 1: Summarise key issues arising from discussion (20 minutes)

Group 2: Summarise key issues arising from discussion (20 minutes)

Whole Group: Present key issues from both groups. Whole group to reach consensus on top five barriers and top five priorities for research engagement in HLIS (60 minutes)
Data Analysis

• Summaries and notes from each focus group verified by participants

• Data sources
  • Individual written comments from 5min exercise
  • Two lists and notes generated from small groups
  • Final consensus list and notes from whole group

• Data sources drawn together and studied carefully for further emerging themes
Results

• Research Priorities
  • Networking
  • Training
  • Marketing
  • Service delivery
  • Research questions
  • Research skills
  • Management of research
  • Research impact
  • Professional development
Results

- Research Barriers
  - Time
  - Fragmentation
  - Research skills
  - Marketing
  - Prioritisation
  - Funding
  - Networking
Focus Group: 5 key barriers to research engagement in HL

- Existing fragmentation of service provision in health librarianship
- Time allocation for research in health librarianship
- Recognition of the value and role of research in health librarianship
- Funding for research in health librarianship
- Lack of fit between initial training (first degree) and modern research delivery
Focus Group: 5 key priorities for research engagement in HL

1. Improve the evidence base in health librarianship
2. Identify research topics and prioritise a research programme in health librarianship
3. Research related CPD for health librarians
4. Research related mapping work in health librarianship
5. Research related leadership in health librarianship
Discussion

• Factors identified by the focus group are complex and fundamentally linked to one another.

• Contexts in which discussion occurred ultimately fell into two distinct areas:
  • Professional issues
  • Consumer issues
Conclusions

• Health librarians have a very diverse understanding of the term ‘research’

• Respondents referred to the term in a number of different contexts which had not been fully anticipated

• Two key domains in which health librarians appear to contextualise research

• This study avoided the ‘shades of grey’ approach common to other studies and instead identified a more colourful picture specific to HLIS
Conclusions

• Aimed to try and hear the voices from the different contexts in which health librarianship is practiced

• Whilst there is goodwill towards research, challenges exist (library service user V evidence based progression of the profession)

• Provides a small but key insight into the real concerns for research participation in HLIS
Limitations

• Small sample size
  • Unable to generalise without saturation

• However
  • Representation was felt to be a more important aspect of the study
  • The focus group informed a larger phase of the study which did have a good sample size

• For the final survey categories amended to 8:
  • Health library services librarians (added)
  • Academics (added)
  • Senior information strategy managers (removed)
And finally

• Full article due for publication in Library and Information Science Research (LISR)
References


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References

