

# ENHANCING ACCESS TO HEALTH INFORMATION AT ALBERT COOK MEDICAL LIBRARY, MULAGO HOSPITAL

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## **Abstract**

*Health is considered to be the heart of global development agenda because it's a crucial measure of human development. It is believed that when the population is in good health, it is likely to achieve the sustainable development goals. In an effort to promote physical and mental well-being, and to extend life expectancy for all, the UN Agenda 2030 states that the world must achieve universal health coverage and access to quality health care. No one must be left behind. The study intended to investigate how Albert cook Medical library, Mulago enhances access to health information to the communities it serves. The objects of the study are to identify information sources at Albert Cook Medical Library, to establish current access to health information, to establish challenges that hinder effective access to health information. This study employed interviews and observation methods for data collection. The findings revealed that various information sources are provided such as textbooks, academic medical journals, to mention but a few. It also revealed the different sections namely open and closed access and how information is accessed. Based on the inadequate information resources and power outages were some of the challenges faced. The paper concludes by recommending a standby generator and purchase of more relevant and updated information resources be made.*

**Key words:** *Health information access, Health information, Medical libraries*

## **Background of the study**

Health information provision is seen as major aspect that facilitates effective health information access in the community. Both the health professionals and members of the community who are the consumers of health services need health information service provision for a healthy society. Ibegwam (2013) suggests that the access to health information should be considered as equally

important as to access to drugs and equipment. According to him all are essential tools in the delivery of safe, efficient and effective care and /or advice. The Libraries such as medical libraries play an important role in the dissemination of health information and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. These libraries can also reach out to vulnerable communities by making health information accessible at the point of need; therefore, librarians should strive to meet the health needs of the community (Ibegwam, 2013).

Librarians working in health institutions provide valuable information to consumers by marketing and creating awareness of their services. This is achieved through selecting, personalizing and filtering quality information to specifically meet their unique needs (Kamel, 2003). Zippers et al (2006) stated that Medical Librarians can play an expanded role in health provision by accessing and reviewing medical information and therefore, resources and strategy experts in identifying and disseminating reliable information to different health information seekers.

Albert Cook Medical Library was established by Dr. Albert Cook in 1924. Later, when the Faculty of Medicine was established in 1946, the library started serving higher medical education. The Library houses an archive of the Sir Albert Cook's original hand-written patient records dating back to 1900. In 1965, the medical library was named after its founder, hence its official name "Sir Albert Cook Memorial Library". The Medical Library is a branch of Makerere University Library Service. It is Uganda's major Biomedical/Health Sciences Library. In 1990, SatelLife introduced the library to electronic resources using e-mail. This opened the doors to accessing current literature and facilitating document delivery.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Provision and access to information by libraries is the major aspect to support not only learning but also access to information by users which is valuable for solving human health challenges. Wander Wagacha, (2007) stated that appropriate information provision about various diseases, prevention, and treatment and care services can result into proper decision making as regards to healthy living. This is also legally provided for by the laws of Uganda, specifically the Access to Information Act, 2005. For such information to be used successfully, it must be available, accessible and usable. However, according to Otiye and Omboi (2010), most librarians and libraries are adamantly refusing to adhere to the changing needs of users coupled with constant resistance to change from the traditional librarianship to the present user centered services and many other obstacles such as funding. From the above descriptions, it is evident that a lot needs to be done to improve provision and access to information by users in medical libraries. The need for this study.

### ***Objectives of the study***

- i. To identify information sources at Albert Cook Medical Library.
- ii. To establish current access to health information.
- iii. To establish challenges that hinder effective access to health information.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Health Information***

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) (2005) defined health information as “any information whether oral or recorded in any form or medium, that was created or received by health care provider, health plan public health. Information is a prerequisite to the development of any nation and is a driving force for development, whether economic, social, or political. Information is also an indispensable contributor to good health outcomes, and a critical element of well-functioning health systems. For these reasons, universal access to health information is a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Godlee et al., 2004).

It is important to note that, for information to be used, it must be available, accessible, and usable, and absorbed by the recipients of the information (Wagacha, 2007). This collaborates with what Zippers et al (2006) stated, that Medical Librarians can play an expanded role in health provision by accessing and reviewing medical information and therefore, resources and strategy experts in identifying and disseminating reliable information to different health information seekers.

To achieve physical access to the sources, the individual user has to know that the information exists, where it can be found, and how to navigate the institutional structures to reach it (Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008). The individual may also need help to understand, and act on health information, especially written information (Colledge et al, 2008).

### ***Information sources in Medical Libraries***

- i. Ibegwam (2003) identified different information sources and their formats in medical libraries
- ii. All printed monographs and textbooks that are available in Medical libraries, Faculty libraries, Department resources and even the Medical Records Departments are in printed format.
- iii. Information in digital storage devices like MEDLINE on CD-ROM, reference updates, provision of computers are in form of Stand-alone-computing.

- iv. Web and the internet, internet gateways such as Health links are Internet based computing format.
- v. Television, radio, newspapers-Mass media

### ***Health Information Access***

Health information access is the patients' ability to identify and obtain relevant, accurate and suitable information to satisfy health information needs. Lack of access to health information is a problem because this might create a vacuum in patients understanding of their diseases and ultimately affect their perception of their capability to manage these diseases (Anyaoku and Nwosu, 2017).

### ***Challenges faced in Medical Libraries***

According to Covell et al (1985) there are those problems that arise as a result of inadequate resources, untrained human resources, infrastructural problems include power outages. Others are lack of awareness, access training and time. In addition, Broadnax (1995) in Milimo & Tenya (2013) observed that in many communities health libraries are struggling with slashed budgets, reduced staff and competing priorities.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design. The study employed interview and observation methods to collect majorly qualitative data from the respondents. The study population comprised of medical students of Mulago Hospital as well as the staff of Albert Cook medical library. The study focused on medical students because they are the primary users of the library and they practice from Mulago Hospital where this library is located. The students included practicing doctors and nurses. Ten (10) medical students were randomly selected from a pool of 70 students who were in the library at the time of data collection. Additionally, four (4) library staff was purposely selected out of the fifteen Medical Librarians, making a total of fourteen (14) participants which formed the sample size for this study. A descriptive analysis technique was used to analyze the data collected.

### **Findings of the Study**

#### ***Objective One: Health information sources in Albert Cook Medical Library***

The findings of this study showed that the sources of health information resources at Albert cook library, Mulago are mainly academic medical journals, scholarly magazines, newspapers, Medical Atlases for students, Encyclopedias, Government reports related to health such as reports on immunization, secondary sources of information that is dissertations and text books which are medical related were indicated by the participants of this study. This finding concurs with Mohammed & Abule, (2014) who carried out a study on An

Examination of health information service provision at Federal Medical Center, Katsina. The authors indicated that books and periodicals such as medical journals, newspapers, and magazines are some of the information sources used in Medical libraries.

#### *Formats in which information is delivered in Albert Cook Medical Library*

Findings also revealed that printed materials such as books and journals are the major forms in which health information sources are presented, they are also presented in electronic from the internet such as the electronic resources' databases such as HINARI, ScienceDirect, MEDLINE and others on DVDs and CDs. In support of this, Ibegwam (2013) carried out a study and observed that information formats such as books and journals are the major forms in which health information is presented in Nigerian Libraries.

#### ***Objective Two: Access of Health Information in Albert Cook Medical Library***

Finding reveal that the basic change in information access has caused everyone to think of information differently and has changed expectations on how information can be accessed and what kind of information is available. Library users in Albert Cook Medical Library, Mulago access different printed information through two different sections;

- i. The open access where a medical student or medical doctor picks the book from the shelves, takes to the issue desk and with the help of the Librarian the book is lent out to him or her for two weeks.
- ii. With the closed access/reserve section library users ask for books they want and leave their Identity cards behind with this, users are not supposed to move out with the materials. Electronic health information is accessed from the library computer laboratory. Some health information databases require passwords in order to access them. Passwords are pinned on the laboratory notice board which makes it easy for anyone to access.

#### ***Objective Three: Challenges in Albert Cook Medical Library***

According the data collected it showed that both the medical library staff and the users face challenges.

#### *Challenges of Albert Cook Medical Library in Availing Information to Users*

- i. Inadequate space; this is not enough in that one staff was quoted saying: *“the space is not enough and even the extension they promised we have no access to it because is not yet complete”*.
- ii. Inadequate resources such as books, the participant interviewed revealed that the relevant books are few in number compared to the

- number of users is a challenge as seen with the previous researchers in the Literature review.
- iii. Computers are also not enough and this is coupled with the challenge of unstable internet. This limits the staff from providing the users with the information at the time of need.
  - iv. Power outages are also a challenge too as Broadohax (1995) also states that infrastructural problems such as power outages.
  - v. In Albert Cook Medical Library they face the challenge of limited budget. Wasike, & Tenya, (2013) stated inadequate funding for purchase of health information materials at Kenya Medical training college. It was also found out that Donors tend to give them outdated books which are not required by users.
  - vi. It was also found out that patients are not allowed to access the Library and even outsiders such as external researchers who tend to use the facility have to pay some fee. Some of the respondents interviewed revealed that this comes as challenge to these external users who might have the need for some health information and are denied access to the information because they don't have money at that particular time.
  - vii. This also comes as challenge to the patients where for them they are totally not allowed to access the information from the Medical Library yet as patients they also have need to access this health information so as to satisfy their various health information needs as defined by (Ebele and Obiora, 2017).

#### *Challenges faced by users of Albert Cook Medical Library*

- i. It was discovered that there were inadequate relevant books in the library, this limits the access of the necessary health information by users. This challenge is marked by both the staff and the users.
- ii. They also complained about the internet being on and off and having few extension cables yet most of them have their personal computers which they can use instead of the Library computers.

#### **Recommendations**

- i. A Stand by generator is required in order to solve the unnecessary power outages. Mohammed & Abule, (2014) also suggested an alternative power supply to solve on the problem of power outages.
- ii. More funding to purchase relevant books should be provided so that users can all access the required health information on time. Wasike, & Tenya, (2013), also suggested the need for more funding of health care information.

- iii. More relevant and up to-date books and other health information materials should be purchased in order reduce or even eliminate the inadequacy of information materials.
- iv. Patients should be allowed to access the Library since the library is within the Mulago hospital premises. Malpani, (1999) also suggested that if we empower patients with information about their medical problems, they can become educated persons in their own medical care.
- v. Information literacy; this is a crucial skill where academic Librarians in Higher institutions for this case Albert Cook Medical Librarians since they are part of Makerere University can use it as an educational reform where skills such as efficiently locating, accurately evaluating and clearly communicating information in various formats can be taught to the users of the Medical Library.

## **Conclusion**

There was access of health information at Albert Cook Medical library to a specific group of individuals, though we saw the need that the medical library can be open to the general public namely patients by providing current and reliable health information. Medical Librarians have a big role to play in improving the health information to the society. The library can as well partner with the surrounding community to ensure that every person gets access to vital health information.

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