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Learning from Each Other: Peer-Reviewed Literature Searching

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System Library Services

A centralized library department with a single budget & collection serving all of Providence including 52+ acute care hospitals and the University of Providence School of Health Professions. Our team of 15 library professionals mix remote work with staffing 10 library spaces.



Background

Due to shrinking staffing levels and expanding business, we decided to develop a **peer-learning program** to build literature **search capacity** and **self-efficacy** amongst librarians and library support staff.

We hoped this would also serve as a **team building** exercise for colleagues who may not have the opportunity to work together directly.

Methods

Library staff partner and rotate every month.

Goal is **1 monthly** search practice and peer review debrief.

- librarian : librarian, sends one another a search and debrief on TWO searches
- library specialist : librarian, the librarian shares a search and they both debrief on that ONE search

For accountability, teams send a brief email to the Library Director by month's end with 2-3 things learned or challenges encountered.

REDCap Survey Questions

Comfort with Searching Health Sciences Literature

"This survey is designed to gather information about your experience and comfort with performing literature searches in the health sciences. All effort is made to keep the survey anonymous, but we are a small group so it cannot be guaranteed."

What is your role? Librarian / Specialist

How confident are you in your literature search / PubMed skills? (Likert 1-5)

Two open ended:

- What might encourage you to ask for colleagues' help with a literature search?
- What might prevent you from asking for colleagues' help with a literature search?

REDCap Initial Survey Results

Respondents: librarians = 9 | specialists = 2 | Years of experience = 1-27

How confident are you in your literature search/PubMed skills?

Librarians: Very confident = 2 | Confident = 5 | Somewhat confident = 2 | A little confident = 0 | Not at all confident = 0

Specialists: Very confident = 0 | Confident = 0 | Somewhat confident = 1 | A little confident = 1 | Not at all confident = 0

How comfortable are you asking library colleagues for help with searches?

Very comfortable = 4 | Comfortable = 4 | Somewhat comfortable = 1 | A little comfortable = 0 | Not at all comfortable = 0

How often do you ask library colleagues for help with searches?

More than once a month = 0 | Once a month = 2 | Three to four times a year = 3 | Once or twice a year = 3 | Never = 1

Initial Survey Results

What might encourage you to ask for colleagues' help with a literature search?

“I ask for help when I think I might be missing something. Sometimes I just get a gut feeling there should be something out there. Maybe I need **another set of eyes** to approach search differently.”

“I typically ask if I can't find articles or **I think there should be more**. If we do peer-review on a regular basis, everyone will feel more comfortable, I think.”

“When I **feel stuck**”

What might prevent you from asking for colleagues' help with a literature search?

“The assumption that colleagues **may not have the time** to help and may be occupied with their own workload.”

“I **don't want to impose** on anyone's time. Sometimes it's **embarrassing** to let other's see my convoluted strategies.”

“Worry about **overburdening** colleagues, search is urgent - not enough time to wait for a reply, feeling like I should be able to figure it out myself”

Initial feedback from staff

- Concerns about spending **additional time** on this, one additional search plus meeting with a colleague each month
- Questions from Library Specialists that don't conduct searches as part of their job: **what was the point** of this exercise, confidence levels, nervous about task
- Misunderstanding project instructions
- Not everyone saw the team building opportunity that was intended

Feedback after several rounds of searches

Many people mentioned that it was a nice opportunity to get to work with library staff that they wouldn't have otherwise, and that after the first time the intimidation went away.

- From Library Specialist, "I took an entirely different approach than [Librarian] – and I think my approach was not the best – but the beauty of this is that I learned a LOT from [Librarian]'s advancement in this process. This was the most challenging example of a literature search so far for me – but I appreciated this one the MOST because it taught me a lot! And it encourages me to browse our options available (such as [policy repository]).“
- “It was helpful to discuss the way you built your search, and how it gathered relevant results. Glad we took a look at CINAHL together.”
- “This was a very fun exercise!”
- “I love that [Librarian] didn't “go easy” on me – as a student, I want these kinds of challenges, because it will help me learn the most!
- “It was really nice to talk to [Librarian] and see her approach – I sent a search request with a lot of parts that may or may not have been entirely connected to each other. [Librarian] and I took it in different directions and got different results, which made me realize some things I missed and should follow up on.”
- “I've been loving this project! I've been learning a lot about MeSH terms and different interfaces (OVID vs PubMed). I have something to learn from everybody on our team “

Next Steps

Peer-reviewed searches will continue through the end of 2022

We will survey participants again and review for improvements in confidence levels and likelihood of approaching colleagues for help.

Based on results, we will decide to continue in 2023 or not.

Is there an opportunity to scale this project up to MLA as a Professional Development / Continuing Education offering, especially for those solo librarians who could benefit from colleagues' feedback?

Thank you

Questions or comments: Heather.Martin@providence.org