
BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing the hospital library to nurses

By Linda E. Bunyan, M.L.S.
Director, Medical Library

Saint Thomas Medical Center
Member, Summa Health System
Akron, Ohio 44310

Evelyn M. Lutz, Ph.D.*
Consultant

2320 Echo Valley Drive
Stow, Ohio 44224

Medical librarianship literature has focused primarily on the needs of physicians, medical students, and faculty, while the library needs of nurses have been covered infrequently. The paucity of such literature and the perceived limited use of the library by nurses stimulated one hospital librarian to examine nurses as a user group. This article presents a case study about the use of a marketing audit and strategies targeted to nurses in one hospital setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing activities are relatively new to health services organizations, dating from only the late 1970s. The use of marketing techniques by hospital librarians is even more recent. Many definitions of marketing, including the following, recognize it as a process of disseminating information: "Marketing is a business strategy designed to provide information about the potentials of a service or product to consumers of a given service in order to entice the potential consumer of that given service or product" [1]. Marketing is more than providing information about established goods or services to potential consumers. A "market-driven marketing process . . . must begin with an identification of needs and wants, and then lead to the development and promotion of a product that fulfills those needs and wants" [2]. The dissemination of information, identification of needs, and promotion of library services are already familiar concepts to librarians.

The use of marketing strategies presumes that a marketing audit has been performed to determine the needs and wants of potential consumers. In a hospital library, resources and services of a long-standing nature may be in place without documented knowledge

of changing needs and wants of actual or potential users. The concept of a library marketing audit, recently introduced in the literature, was defined as the process that permits a library to examine its audiences and services within the contextual environment for the purposes of evaluation, decision making, and long-range planning [3].

Nursing underwent many changes in the 1980s. Among these were an increase in the proportion of registered nurses on hospital nursing staffs, an increase in the ratio of registered nurses to hospital patients, and a growing demand for nurses with baccalaureate and master's degrees [4]. Concurrent with these higher educational expectations, the discipline of nursing was also evolving. Nurses were encouraged to improve their practice through the cautious use of findings from nursing research. The growth of literature on nursing research during that decade was such that the heading "Nursing Research" was added to MeSH† in 1989. However, recent literature has noted that MeSH vocabulary favors medical rather than nursing concepts [5].

Nurses may also face perceived or real institutional barriers in attempting to use a hospital library. Such barriers include limited library hours and limited time to use the library resources due to the requirements of patient care. Developments in nursing along with real or perceived barriers to using the library should influence the services and resources nurses require of the hospital library.

MARKETING AUDIT

The authors' observations of the above changes and potential barriers led them to initiate an audit of nurses' information-seeking habits and needs. Three data-gathering processes were used. The librarian initiated record keeping on the use of the library by category of user; patrons' questions were recorded along with the outcome of service provided; and several items were included in a survey prepared for another project to obtain data about nurses' knowledge and perceptions of the hospital library, their information needs, approaches to meeting these needs, and barriers to using the library.

Following clearance from the nursing research review committee, letters to head nurses of each unit in a 400-bed teaching hospital were sent to encourage their support in implementing the study. The survey instrument was distributed subsequently to 363 registered nurses. A coding system assured anonymity,

* Formerly, School of Nursing, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44240.

† MeSH is a registered trademark of the National Library of Medicine.

and a return envelope addressed to Volunteer Service was enclosed. Colorful flyers were posted in the units one week later reminding nurses to complete the survey. One hundred forty-five (40%) of the nurses returned completed instruments. All respondents answered all survey questions.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the records kept on library use and questions asked over one year revealed that nurses, while constituting about 31% of the hospital's employees, represented only 6% of the library's clientele. Most of the questions asked by nurses related to management issues rather than patient care, and the questions were initiated by nurses in management positions rather than nurses who were in more frequent contact with patients.

Survey results indicated that 78% (113 of 145) believed that using any library was a pleasant experience, while only 8% (12 of 145) did not see the library as being helpful to their work. Data from questions about nurses' knowledge about the hospital library indicated that the majority were unfamiliar with most of the services and resources available to them. Seventy-six percent (110 of 145) agreed with the statement "Greater efforts should be made to assist nurses to use the library more effectively."

Sixty-seven percent (97 of 145) of the nurses surveyed needed more information on patient care within the past month, and 71% (103 of 145) consulted with another person for information on patient care, usually the head nurse or a nurse colleague, rather than using other resources. Seventy percent (102 of 145) identified lack of time to be away from the nursing unit as the reason for not using the library; 20% (29 of 145) indicated that they could not use the library because it was not open during their shift. Twenty-one percent (31 of 145) did not perceive the hospital library to be an available resource.

The audit's results indicated that, although nurses have a positive view of libraries, a need existed to market even the most basic services of the hospital library. As the majority of questions were asked by nurses in management positions, the focus of the marketing strategies became not nurses in general, but specifically those in nonmanagerial positions.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

The librarian developed a number of marketing strategies that targeted the nursing population. The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) requires nursing representation on the hospital library committee, but with physicians comprising the majority, the needs of nursing

and allied health personnel were shortchanged. A separate nursing and allied health library committee was formed recently and consists of six members, three each from nursing and allied health. The committee meets at least twice yearly to review purchase recommendations and provide continuing input on the information needs for members' fields of practice.

A monthly nursing newsletter already had been established; a column by the librarian now appears in each issue. Content has included reviews of recent acquisitions, recommendations from the new library committee, and descriptions of basic library services and resources unfamiliar to nurses according to the survey. The librarian developed and tested a slide tour of the library. A taped narration, synchronized with the slides, permits the program to be available to nursing units around-the-clock.

The librarian also began attending change-of-shift reports on various units to gain understanding of the focus of nursing, its vocabulary, and nurses' work situations in addition to providing direct contact between the librarian and staff nurses. Head nurses now receive photocopies of the tables of contents of selected journals, from which they request articles pertinent to their patient clientele. The implementation of a Literature Attached to CHart (LATCH) program is being considered [6].

The availability of a telephone answering service was heavily publicized on the nursing units following its recent installation. Nurses on all shifts now have access to the library. This twenty-four hour service, including weekends, was initiated following the marketing audit.

CONCLUSION

Efforts to reach the hospital nursing market continue. To date, conducting the audit and implementing the strategies has not required additional budgetary resources. The library staff members (one librarian and two assistants covering sixty hours per week) have enjoyed the creative challenge involved in marketing their services. The activities have been integrated into library responsibilities without negative impact. Analysis of the usage data following the implementation of the marketing strategies has indicated a moderate but steady increase in nurses' requests for library services and resources.

In summary, the marketing audit of nurses, a targeted user group, required data about their information habits and needs as well as their use patterns. An understanding of nurses' practice and work situation and ongoing changes in nursing provided valuable insight for planning the audit and selecting strategies. Promoting services and resources through various strategies will continue.

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FROM THE *BULLETIN*—25 YEARS AGO

Extramural programs of the NLM

*By Marjorie P. Wilson, M.D., Carl D. Douglas, Ph.D., David F. Kefauver,
National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland*

The uses for which grants made by NLM under Section 397 of the Medical Library Assistance Act may be used include, but are not limited to, the acquisition of books, journals, photographs, motion pictures and other films, and other instructional materials; cataloging, binding, and other services and procedures for processing library resource materials; and the introduction of new technologies and methodologies in medical librarianship. The amount of the grants will be related to the annual operating expenses of the library and will decrease regularly in amount annually for a five-year period. The purpose of this approach is (1) to make a significant but relatively short-term grant to bring basic resources to a more useful level, and (2) to encourage increased support to the library by the parent institution on a continuing basis to compensate for the decreasing federal contribution.

The magnitude of the need of library resources cannot be accurately measured. The present level of collections, budgets, and personnel in various types of libraries has been examined and compared to suggested standards repeatedly. Numbers of volumes unrelated to the scope and quality of the collection are essentially meaningless. The numbers of professional medical librarians or their equivalents can only be estimated in the most gross manner. Expenditures for books, periodicals, and binding per medical student last year, for example, ranged from \$26 to \$613.20. What can be said is that resources generally fall short of the requirements for good library service.

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