
BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

Clinical veterinary librarianship—the Texas A&M University experience

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BACKGROUND

The Medical Sciences Library (MSL) serves the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) at Texas A&M University (TAMU), and, on April 18, 1980, a librarian began attending rounds in the small animal clinic, initiating a clinical veterinary librarian (CVL) service [1]. No literature about similar services has been cited in the Library and Information Science Abstracts, Library Literature, or CAB Abstracts databases. While clinical medical librarian (CML) services are well documented in the literature [2], no program appears to serve veterinarians and veterinary students exclusively. The unique nature of this service, coupled with recent expansions, prompted the involved librarians to describe the service for a professional audience. This paper gives an overview of the CVL service at the TAMU MSL, including the fiscal, personnel, training, and procedural issues involved, as well as descriptive statistics about the use of the service over the last six years. Future plans for expanding the service are also discussed.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

CVL services work much the same as traditional CML services. Librarians attend rounds once or twice a week in either the large or small animal clinics of the CVM and perform four key activities: (1) literature searching to support faculty research, patient care, and student presentations; (2) initiation and delivery of

document delivery or photocopy service requests; (3) refreshing and reinforcing basic science concepts, typically with relevant textbook materials; and (4) research consultations with students and faculty about the best resources for their needs. Typically, librarians offer same-day service in response to clinical inquiries, either delivered to the seminar room, sent to student or faculty mailboxes, or emailed directly to the requestor.

GOALS, FINANCING, TRAINING, AND PROCEDURES

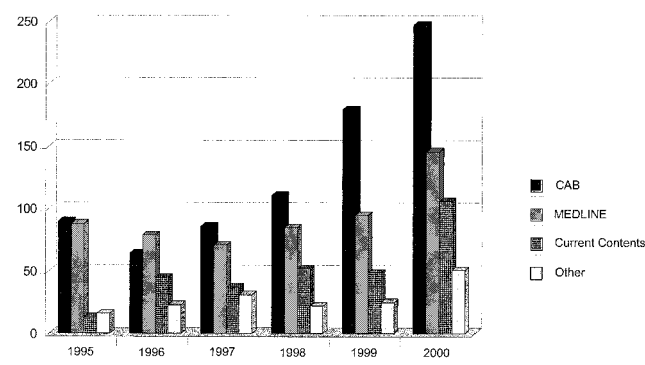
The CVL program has three stated goals: to enhance patient care, to augment clinical education, and to promote use of the MSL through increased visibility. Compatible with trends in health care, these goals put the library in what Stead terms the "critical path" [3] of medical center business—in this case, *veterinary* medical center business. Part of business is determining payment for services. In April of 2001, MSL ceased charging for photocopying and interlibrary loan of articles for the CVL program, making this a free service.

Training for new librarians consists of attending rounds with an experienced librarian. The trainee searches the literature and files the appropriate paperwork for document delivery. Eventually, the trainee takes over an assigned rounds session. New personnel are trained extensively on the CAB Abstracts database. The veterinary literature cannot be searched effectively by using only MEDLINE, which indexes a fraction of veterinary medical journals available.

Rounds at the CVM are typically held in the morning, with different rotations meeting for various lengths of time. Librarians generally attend the entire rounds discussion, take requests for relevant literature, and return to the library to perform the searches, initiate document delivery, or photocopy materials. Document delivery requests are tracked on a standard MSL photocopy service form. CVL questions are tracked using Microsoft Access 97. Librarians enter data about the search in a form, including the search topic, databases used, date of search, and name of the clinician or faculty member requesting the search. These data provide useful information about the service and are analyzed on a regular basis.

Data have been extracted from both Microsoft Access 97 and Paradox, for 1995 to 2000. Total questions for the service, from both small and large animal medicine departments, are as follows: 1995: 104 questions, 1996: 95 questions; 1997: 92 questions, 1998: 130 questions, 1999: 192 questions, and 2000: 252 questions. Over the past six years, small animal medicine has asked 624 questions and large animal medicine has asked 241 questions. The total number of questions,

Figure 1
Database use



however, is a crude estimate of service usage. Librarians search more than one database to answer any given question, and Figure 1 and Table 1 illustrate database usage for all six years of data. In order, CAB Abstracts, MEDLINE, and Current Contents are the most frequently searched files, for both departments and for all years.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Data for 1996 and 1997 are likely underreported due to personnel changes, which resulted in fewer librarians performing CVL service. The librarians presently involved are confident that the total questions asked would show a linear increase without such interruptions in service. The fact that small animal medicine has asked over 350 more questions than large animal medicine reflects more librarians being assigned to small animal medicine rotations.

That CAB Abstracts is used most often is no surprise. The low use of Current Contents may be explained by the fact that much of clinical veterinary practice relies on case reports found in older literature. These citations are valuable because they are the only cases reported on the subject, and their age is irrelevant. Other databases are also routinely searched. For example, BIOSIS Previews provides access to conference proceedings and auxiliary literature in animal science. MEDLINE is critically important, due to the superiority of its indexing. Zoological Record, AGRICOLA, Papers First, and Proceedings First are also searched.

There is the possibility for error in self-reporting data. This type of error could easily apply to recording the use of databases for the CVL program. While the collection of statistics for reference services is problematic, the authors maintain that these statistics for CVL service are accurate and reflect the usage of the program. Recording CVL data is not such an intensive

task that it would produce constant error, and CVL questions are discrete and identifiable.

The presence of librarians on rounds has many ramifications. The CVL service provides a unique exposure to the curriculum for the librarians, with the direct involvement of MSL in learning about the research and teaching needs of one of their major constituencies. Additionally, the CVL service is satisfying and intellectually challenging. The real value, however, is that the CVL service is a highly visible promotion, both of library services and the professional skills of librarians, in support of the clinical practice responsibilities of CVM faculty and residents. This program is also a value-added service for students, which contributes directly to their education. More importantly, the CVL service contributes to lifelong learning for the students in two important ways: it enables students to formulate and refine clinical questions, and it makes them evaluate the quality of retrieved information. Additionally, it emphasizes to the students the importance of reading the literature of their profession. All these skills are essential parts of information literacy [4] and will be important in their clinical practice.

Future plans for CVL service include providing information at the point of care in the clinics, likely through the use of handheld technologies. For example, drug-interaction questions could be answered immediately if such resources were available on a handheld computing device. MSL is committed to exploring the use of such technology and developing applications for clinical information services.

Clinical librarianship is not a new concept. In a new and volatile health care economy, services such as the CVL service assert the library's critical role as a provider of information and instruction in the face of many alternatives. Additionally, the program is cost effective, providing benefits in excess of the few hours a week that librarians spend in rounds. In maintaining the CVL service, the Medical Sciences Library at Texas A&M University positions itself in a vital part of the College of Veterinary Medicine's educational mission and improves the student experience by promoting critical inquiry and lifelong learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Table 1
Database use

Database	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
CAB	90	64	86	111	180	248
MEDLINE	88	79	71	85	95	146
Current Contents	13	45	37	52	49	106
Other	16	23	31	22	25	51

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