

Partner with Hospital Librarians to Improve Patient Care

Hospital libraries and library staff are essential partners in providing excellent healthcare and achieving optimal patient outcomes. Studies repeatedly document how using clinical evidence enhances how providers practice which directly correlates with improved patient outcomes and satisfaction as well as high-quality healthcare. Hospital librarians and library staff play a critical role in helping healthcare teams bridge the gap between data and practice by guiding caregivers to the best evidence and reducing barriers to evidence-based practice. [i] [ii] [iii]

We urge hospital and health system executives and leaders to consider the key services and roles hospital libraries and library staff play in supporting organizational goals. Funding a hospital library with a qualified librarian clearly demonstrates the organization's commitment to quality of care and manifests a high priority placed on evidence-based practice and lifelong learning required by accreditation guidance and standards. [iv] [v]

Hospital librarians and the resources they provide, facilitate improved clinical decision-making and higher quality healthcare across the care continuum, including post-acute care settings. Their contributions also provide valuable financial incentives that include preventing adverse events, reducing unnecessary treatments and tests, and reducing length of stay. [iii] [vi] [vii]

Nurses, pharmacists, hospital administrators and others who often lead or serve on quality assurance and other key hospital committees, may not have affiliations with academic institutions giving them access to journals, books, or data to inform their practice decisions. Additionally, evidence-based information and licensed resources may be expensive or unavailable for individual purchase. Librarians and library staff are uniquely skilled at retrieving quality information and can negotiate access to the best information for their institution, enabling hospital staff to make timely and evidence-based decisions.

Patients, families and health consumers seeking health information confront an overwhelming amount of false or misleading information made available via various social media platforms. Sufficiently funding librarians and library staff to provide access to relevant, accurate, evidence-based materials can help break this logjam of misinformation and strengthen community connections. Librarian expertise in health literacy also gives them an important role in providing information to consumers, patients, and family members--thereby complementing hospitals' community benefit.

Hospital libraries are often located in underserved communities with vulnerable patient populations. These patients, and the clinicians who treat them, suffer the most when they encounter barriers that prevent timely access to quality evidence-based resources. Librarians are uniquely skilled at eliminating such barriers and ensuring equitable access to information.

Health care providers are stretched thin, experiencing high rates of burnout, and need more time. As members of the health care team, librarians provide vital support that ensures patient safety. They have the skills, expertise, and professional training to offer valuable services that save time for healthcare providers and administration, who can then use that time to care for patients and to increase the institution's revenues. [viii]

Hospitals without a librarian are missing a key part of their health care team. Librarians make it possible for the rest of the team to focus their expertise and energy on effectively providing evidence-based care to patients.

Hospital and health system executives must take concrete action to support clinical and administrative staff, patients and their families, and communities by funding hospital library services led by a professional librarian. Working together, hospitals, health care systems, and librarians are positioned to provide the resources, access, and support your health care teams can depend upon to provide evidence-based practice services that will support healthy patient outcomes. [ix]

The Medical Library Association (MLA) is the professional home of more than 1,000 hospital librarians and knowledge specialists; these librarians promote evidence-based standards for hospital library services. We encourage you to work with MLA as you consider how to fund and recruit librarians and library staff for your hospital and health care systems.

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