

LOOKING FOR NEW PATHS IN EDUCATING THE HEALTH INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN BRAZIL

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INTRODUCTION

Researches done by the authors in the last years, first with university research and teaching staff and later, with practitioners from the local health system, brought forward many questions related to possible the health professionals' behaviour when searching for information, as well as to the necessary requirements for an adequate performance of the librarian who intends to work in the health areas.

From the results obtained, specially from the medical doctors, the research group now is searching the grounds of a proposal for training information professional which would take into account the interviewees' statements, especially the medical doctors', psychologists' and nutritionists that emphasized the need of special knowledge and training in the health fields.

Among the suggestions pointed out by the health professionals interviewed, there were such services as: development and updating the sources of researches, democratization and dissemination of health information, development of virtual/digital libraries, library and databasis information retrieval, and familiarity with indexing systems.

Besides the above activities, the interviewees described the desired profile for the librarian's performance in health areas related to finding quick and active ways of getting things done in the information systems as well as to the excellence in meeting the final users' needs, in which important requirements are: good professional experience, strategic vision, updating and continuing education, personal conduct (cordiality, good sense and professional ethics) and domain of the English language.

Before the current Law of Guidelines and Bases of the Brazilian education (LDB), much was discussed among library educators on the convenience of professional library education taking place only at the masters degree level as it happens in countries under the Anglo-American influence, but the divergent positions never allowed that idea to gain enough force to put

upon to the academic model existing in the country since the beginning of last century. Other options discussed among library educators can be said to be the amplification or diversification of the degree course with the offering of specific qualifications, or short courses being offered also in specific knowledge fields.

These various options had better chances to come into being with the Government approval of the new educational law in December 1996. It came to put an end to an old obstacle to the academic freedom: the compulsory minimum curriculum for all the university courses in the country, and then, the existent higher education institutions started to have larger autonomy to discuss the organization of their academic programs according to their own teaching priorities at institutional, regional and global levels.

On a larger context, it can be still observed today an urban Brazil with agricultural characteristics, a country still underdeveloped whose solution for the high rates of unemployment cannot only be restricted to investments in government policies but, to a great extent, in educational policies that would make people able to explore all their potentiality and flexibility needed to fit on a increasingly changing job market.

The proposal being developed for Library and Information area is in the sense of not just *inform*, but to *form* professional librarians, in a way to motivate their curiosity to ask questions, to develop their solving problems capacity, as well as to efficiently perform their activities in the health areas as indicated by the interviewees' statements.

LOOKING FOR NEW PATHS

The developments in the area of Library Education and Teaching in Brazil can be divided, up to now, in four great periods: (a) from 1915 to 1929 when the setting up of the first course at the National Library in Rio de Janeiro, marked the beginning of the formal library teaching in the country, inspired by the " bibliophile-erudite's " French academic model; (b) from 1929 to 1970 when the establishment of a library course at Mackenzie's College in São Paulo signalled the era of the North American influence (inspired in the "bibliographer-technician's" model) upon the Brazilian librarianship, which lasted for the next four decades ahead and guided many other established courses in this period in the whole country; (c) from 1970 to 1990 when the creation of the master's degree course in Information Science at IBICT/UFRJ (which had been offering a professional postgraduate (*lato sensu*) course since 1957) marked the beginning of the posgraduate (*stricto sensu*) system that happened to bring various modifications in the information theories and studies, developing a Brazilian professional literature that has also exerted influences on the practice and services being offered in the area; (d) starting from 1990, the last period came with the great technological innovations in the communication, microelectronics and engineering fields, and made possible the improvement of library and information services infrastructure and

the setting up of network and electronic services, whose accelerated development has allowed new technological developments a few years ago still unimaginable in the country.

In the effort to answer to the new and complex demands of the Brazilian society, the information professionals have been aiming to develop high standard information programs and services. They wish no longer be seen from an isolated professional perspective - their activities are highly interdisciplinary and call for an integrative view with other sciences disciplines in order to favour the cooperation, and the creation of systems, nets or consortia, essential elements for effective meeting the users' specific needs.

At the beginning of this 21st century, great changes are taking place worldwide which affect the professions and local job markets. In Brazil, it is most urgent a better understanding between library schools and employing institutions where future librarians will be doing their jobs.

When coming across with new challenges related to the planning and management of specific services of information, or treatment, content representation and information retrieval in new shapes, formats, or even other tasks that involve the use of more advanced technological tools, or even the need for studies and researches in order to base their decision making processes, the professionals usually understand that they will have to look for this knowledge elsewhere, probably at the postgraduate programs.

At this postgraduate level, the library profession frequently arouse the interest in individuals with a various background undergraduate courses. Nevertheless, it is expected from the research group that the librarian can and should act in different fields and areas, due to the nature of the object of your work - the information (present in all the human activities).

Thus, the so far obtained results and suggestions from the subjects of the earlier mentioned research will be used to subsidize a future proposal of postgraduate course for information professionals ready to work in the health areas.

Such a proposal would encompass, briefly, the following areas:

- Continuing education
- English language
- Documentary languages
- Knowledge and development of new resources in health information
- Personal development - communication, critical and analytical abilities

Being more specific, the proposal should offer solution for the deficiencies and shortcomings found in the specialization courses offered nowadays; it should also look for the formative character of a interdisciplinary librarian able to exercise the expected professional tasks for the benefit of the health areas; it should develop strategies to stimulate the continuing education. In other words, to develop the spirit of " awareness" in the professional so that he may be attentive to

the new sources and resources of health information which, together with available new technologies, will bring the right scientific or technological materials to the final user.

The proposal should still embrace the development of the professional librarian's analytic and critical sense in order to qualify him for the selection and dissemination of information among the health professionals and, making possible him/her the to know and domain of technical terms of the area of health where he/she intends to act.

This proposal of specialization course should also foresee the English language – with emphasis in the health areas - and the librarian's own development.

The literature on the Modern Information Professional (MIP) is very rich and has become object of many researchers' analysis since the works developed by FID that created in 1992 the group SIG/MIP - Special Interest Group/Modern Information Professional (GUIMARÃES).

The broad MIP concept points out to new job opportunities, new attitudes from the librarians and new vision of the area as a whole, including the questioning related to the integration perspectives that Smit (1993) called “three Marias” and Beraquet (1981) pointed out as a common curricular core for the information professions.

Guimarães working on this theme since 1994 pointed out that :

" If earlier the professional, seizing an academic diploma, occupied his place in the society starting from the legal prerogatives that were given to him, on the grounds of paradigms that he had learned at school, it is now the turn of the holistic professional, open minded, attentive and flexible to the changes taking place around him and competent enough to provoke them when necessary. The multiple information devices and use brought a wider range of knowledge (and abilities) to the professional questioning, somehow, the rigid professional limits in the former information area".

As personal profile and professional performance are strongly linked to the teaching and education received, it is believed that the addressed training be an important alternative to minimize the complexities of the information provision in the health areas nowadays.

According to Figueiredo (1991), the community of biomedical information users can be divided in four groups of activities, such as: teaching, research, community services and planning and administration of health programs. The author goes on pointing out that this community, in order to keep up to date with new developments in their subject fields, make use of some information resources, among which the following ones: books, newspapers, official publications, technical reports, theses, bibliographies, international organisms publications, taking part in conferences, chats with friends, visits to the libraries, selective dissemination services of the information, such as bulletin of new acquisitions, circulation of newspapers, copies of summaries and informative walls.

Nowadays the available services in most of the information health institutions usually are: retrospective search, SDI, researches in progress, FAQs, alerts, interlibrary loan, surveys and data analysis, reference services, and user's studies and education. But, yet, most of

these activities still have a long way to go in order to meet the real users' needs, and an essential ingredient in all this is the information professional training.

According to a study done by the Health Libraries Research Group (1998), there are some items related to health information that need to be handled with care, such as:

- the structural deficiencies found in health sciences libraries, pointed many times by librarians in their professional meetings;
- the scarce participation of health libraries in cooperative activities and the informal character of those activities when they occur;
- the lack of a structure that stimulates the development of the libraries, the articulation for interlibrary cooperation schemes and the access to scientific information by the health professionals;
- the current trends in developing countries in considering the scientific information as basic resource in order to stimulate the independent study, perhaps favour investigation studies and bring more demand for efficient information services in health areas;
- the recommendations of WHO – World Health Organization, to member states is to establish library networks integrated in the structure of the national health systems;
- the urgent need to modernize the libraries and to improve the services, incorporating in them computer science and telecommunications technologies which come to transform them in an administrative net of biomedical knowledge accessible to all health professionals.

According to Alleyne, apud Ciol (2001), health and education constitute the principal investments in organizing the capital needed for the economical development of any country. Ciol (2001) considers that the concept of information depends on the perspective of those that define it, therefore, despite of appearing unalterable, it possesses elements that transform it according to the context in which it is applied. As new information concept appear, there also come out possibilities for new works involving information, challenges and new demands.

According to Bradley (1996), health information can be constituted of patients' registrations, financial information, pharmaceutical information, newspapers, texts about legislation and health, content in the electronic formats, Web pages, attachés and compared data, books, databasis, clinical indicators and all the institutions' specialists knowledge.

To Branco (1996), health information has as its purpose to identify a population sanitary problems, and so, offering conditions to analyze the social context and to subsidize the possible solutions. In that way, this concept should embrace the administrative information, both essential ones to the decision-making process in the health area.

To think over about health information in Brazil is a challenge that goes beyond the technology of information systems. The professional librarian must understand the social, political, economical and cultural meaning of his work product, placing himself as the active subject of the social process in which he works and lives. However, in order to happen, he should be better prepared for recognizing the specific characteristics and needs of the health field related to the access and use of the information.

FINAL COMMENTS

The research in progress has the main objective to bring the attention from the Library and Information Science Education leaders in the country to the knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics the information professional needs to have in order to effectively perform his duties on a global society in which we are now living in.

This global society can be understood as a period of great changes in all political, economic and social sectors. This can be a transition period to the so called “knowledge society”, where the personal development of people greatly involves the act of *learning*, the act of *knowing*. The globalization process will be truly possible only when the knowledge will be universal., and the role of Education as a whole is to preserve the universality of learning.

In the global economy society, the growing gap between developed and developing countries is not in the volume of raw or manufactured material, but surely in the development level and use of the knowledge and technologies of information available in each country. In that unequal context, the librarian's responsibility increases, as much as the producer as the mediator of the knowledge needed by the population as input for their daily chores, leisure, professional work, personal learning and changes.

The needed information, that will be transformed in knowledge, cannot be only defined as that which is inside documents, but it is also the informal communications that serve as catalytic agents for new ideas. Actually, information is a series of concepts connected by complex relationships.

The knowledge transmission for those that need it is a social responsibility that seems to be the essence of the library and information work. It is fundamental that the area gets closer and closer to the phenomenon that it intends to study, in our case the health areas, in way

to mediate the speech, linking producers and users for the effective use of information as input for the creation of new knowledge.

The paradigms of work and job in modern societies have been changing by the new technologies; however it seems that the paradigms of school and programs which should qualify professional librarians in Brazil had not been changing at the same pace.

The technological, economical and political changes become easier to be assimilated when the man intends first to transform his own view of the world, his own paradigms. Modern urban society transfers all anxiety to man, affecting drastically both his personal and professional life. The librarian, socially and culturally inserted in that process, has to handle not only technical and professional knowledge but also deeply know the context where is going to work.

In the case of the health field, the information is a vital element with which the professionals works daily and, specially, creates new knowledge with the objective of improving people's life. From the librarian working in this area, it is expected that he will be able to understand the whole health scenery in order to use the information technologies available, to develop academic studies and researches and last, but not least, to get near the user in order to better understand his needs. Thus, the information professional will be able to get better conditions to be aware of his importance as producer, mediator and disseminator of information in an area that is essential for the country's overall development.

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