

Information needs and usage of Paramedical professionals in Sri Lanka

A. Sivasanthiran

Library, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

A substantial portion of the workforce of the health sector is made up of Paramedical professionals (Paramedics), who extend supportive skill measures to clinicians in the diagnosis or treatment of ailments. Hence, it is crucial that all required resources are readily available to them to discharge timely and high-quality health services, where information plays a vital part. A review of literature reveals vast distinctions in their information requirements across sub-categories and nations. Further, several performance related problems can be eliminated by the hospital authorities by making the Paramedics information-rich. Therefore, a systematic investigation is essential to understand the information needs and usage patterns of Paramedics in Sri Lanka. Hence, this study is undertaken with the objective of identifying the professional information needs, information channels, preferences, and the problems encountered by the Paramedics in accessing information. This quantitative research with a deductive approach used questionnaires to collect data from the entire population of 51 Paramedics serving a reputed private hospital in Colombo. The internal consistency was tested to be good using Cronbach's alpha (0.886). The findings indicate that there are 60.8% males and 39.2% females, with majority (37.3%) between 41-50 years of age and having 1-10 years of experience (39.2%). Although, their ICT and Information Literacy levels are moderate with mean values of 2.43 and 2.47 respectively on a 3-point Likert scale, they have high interest (mean: 2.71) to improve the same. Three main needs for information were identified: patient care (76.5%), staying up-to-date (72.5%) and own higher studies (31.4%). The frequency of information seeking also corresponded with the above purposes: daily for patient care, weekly for staying up-to-date and occasionally for their higher studies. Chi-square test proved that their affiliated departments together with tasks-performed exert a highly significant influence on their information needs. The findings also reveal that 80.4% of Paramedics prefer to use both printed and electronic forms of information. The Internet (90.2%), knowledge of colleagues (74.5%) and personal collections (58%) are the mostly used general information resources by the said Paramedics, in addition to various other subfield-specific resources. Further, 76.5% of them are well satisfied about the accuracy of the information in their field, yet they are less content on availability (49%), cost (17.6%) and timeliness (15.7%). Limited access to information resources (78.4%) and lack of time (64.7%) are the common problems encountered by the Paramedics in securing professional information, and they believe that these issues can be overcome by establishing a library within their hospital with field-specific collections. These results would be an eye-opener for the information professionals to support the Paramedics by enhancing the availability of information required.

Keywords: *information needs, information sources, paramedical professionals, paramedics*