

Using online journals and e-resources: changing trends in medical schools



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Information about the article

Received: Apr. 5, 2017

Published online: July 10, 2017

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29387/ms.2017.5.1.1>

Remote access to online catalogs, bibliographic databases and eBooks has abruptly changed the learning pattern of medical students. A decade ago, hard copies of medical journals and books were the key sources for medical students and postgraduates, but the internet boom has changed this scenario completely. With the gradual shift from print to electronic materials, computer literacy appeared to play a key role in the use of online resources. Publishers first started offering additional electronic resources alongside printed hard copies.

Today academic institutions are building up substantial collections of full-text online journals and increase access to various online databases. This approach is cost effectiveness (compared to storing hard copies), ecofriendly, user-friendly and easy to access. Increased use of computers, internet, and online databases helps medical students to access material to improve their learning of difficult topics with greater ease. Most universities have their own websites, so-called virtual learning environments where they upload teaching materials, background reading, past exam papers, instructions, advice to students, etc.

Specific questions still need to be addressed including: "Do all users have appropriate computer literacy skills?" and the

more basic question "Do users have appropriate internet access?" Several studies on the efficacy of online usage of medical literature, ebooks show promising results. It has been observed that students preferred accessing electronic databases from their computer lab, smart phones, or other electronic gazettes, rather than going to the library. Studies show the use of print journals in academic libraries has decreased significantly. For libraries this means fewer staff is required for cataloguing, reshelving, maintaining stacks, photocopying, collecting user data, binding, etc.

However increased staffing is required in the information services department, to offer advice, instruction, promotion, and preparation of documentation. Medical students have a tendency to rely primarily on textbooks for information, with reading journal literature as a last option. However, treatment-related questions compelled the students to perform searches in MEDLINE/PubMed rather than depend solely on medical textbooks.

Two problems associated with online resources are: (a) the vast amount of information that can confuse a student; and (b) the uncertain quality of online resources. Learners need tools to help them evaluate the quality of relevant search results and help in selecting the most appropriate ones. Despite the latter issues, online resources are useful, and medical colleges should play a positive role in adopting online resources, subscribing to online journals and databases which will help train a better modern doctor.

Keywords

Computer, electronic databases, internet, library, publisher.

Competing interests

None declared.