Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Editorial

Evidence Based Practice: An Opportunity?

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Welcome to the December 2013 issue of the EBLIP Journal. Looking back it is hard to believe that I have been Editor-in-Chief for two years. My first issue contained a feature of the EBLIP6 conference, and I'm delighted that this issue contains a feature of the EBLIP7 conference, which was held in Saskatoon in July 2013.

I've spent some time reflecting and looking back over the last few weeks; not because I had nothing better to do, but because I was asked to do a keynote speech about my research over the last 10 years (Brettle, 2013). The event was to mark a 10 year anniversary of a health library at Coventry University Hospital in the UK and my speech was entitled "Evidence Based Practice: An opportunity for health librarians?"

Over 10 years ago (and before EBLIP was conceived), EBP was heralded as an opportunity for health librarians to promote their library and expand into new roles (Palmer, 1996; Scherrer & Dorsch, 1999). When I critically appraised the literature on this (Brettle, 2009), I was quite disappointed to find that although EBP had provided the opportunity for promoting the health library, for the most part, librarians' roles hadn't really changed, and the work that they were engaging in, in relation to evidence based practice, was mainly supporting literature reviews and training clinicians to undertake their own searching.

I classified the roles that health librarians may play in relation to evidence based practice into four domains:

1. A supportive role, using traditional skills and expertise to train clinicians to find evidence for practice, to find evidence on behalf of clinicians, or to provide expert searching and guidance in relation to systematic reviews
2. A supportive role, using their knowledge of critical appraisal to teach critical appraisal or to critically appraise

search results to support health professionals in their EBP

3. An active role, using research or critical appraisal to conduct systematic reviews or engage in EBLIP in their own domain (i.e., libraries or health information)
4. An active role, using the EBP skills (critical appraisal or research) outside the library but in the health and social care domain (Brettle, 2009, 2012)

At the time, I found few examples within the literature of librarians using their EBP skills outside their own domain, but there were quite a few examples, perhaps not surprisingly, of librarians engaging in EBLIP to improve the evidence base of their own library practice (Brettle, 2009). One of the problems is that there are few descriptions of librarians engaging in different roles within the literature. I am guilty of this myself, having engaged in systematic reviews outside the library (e.g., Brettle, Hill, & Jenkins, 2008; Dugdill, Brettle, Hulme, McCluskey, & Long, 2008), I did not describe my role, which in both cases involved leading the systematic review itself as well as critically appraising the health literature; pretty active and outside the comfort zone of health libraries! For me, engaging in evidence based activities inside library and information practice gave me the confidence and skills to branch outside my familiar domain, and then on to new roles and opportunities. Other librarians have done similar things (Brettle & Urquhart, 2012). So, I urge you to engage in EBLIP, as you never know where it may take you – to Saskatoon and beyond?

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