Adding value to increase the hospital library profile: a staff publications alerting service

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ADDING VALUE
to increase the hospital library profile: a staff publications alerting service

Easy to set up and administer, a new service by The Queen Elizabeth Hospital Library alerts hospital staff to its collective publishing output. Along with boosting the Library’s visibility, it would also seem to be fostering organisational pride.

Hospital staff are many and varied – doctors, nurses, researchers, medical scientists and allied health professionals – but all have one thing in common; they work in the “publish or perish” industry of health. Many staff become quite isolated in their professional expertise. They work with staff from other hospitals and universities and publish papers with those same people. Often, however, they remain unaware of what is being published by other professionals within their own institutions.

During a brainstorming exercise 12 months ago, library staff were looking at ways to enhance the Library’s visibility for hospital staff via services that would be valued, closely watched and, most importantly, be seen as a “library service”. We were sure that most hospital staff were unaware of just how many peer reviewed articles were being published by The Queen Elizabeth Hospital (TCEH) staff, so we decided to embark on a process of current awareness.

The intention was to be able to identify all articles published by staff of The Queen Elizabeth Hospital and alert all staff to their existence whilst also making it easy for staff to obtain and read those articles.

The first step was to create a search strategy for all of our main databases that would identify anything that was published with an affiliation of “The Queen Elizabeth Hospital”. The search string varied from software to software but tried to take into account all possibilities of The Hospital’s name combined with Australia or our suburb as search limiters. Unfortunately there are many Queen Elizabeth Hospitals around the world and we needed to avoid false hits. The search string looks similar to this example: (Queen Elizabeth Hospital or TCEH or QEII) and (Australia or SA or Woodville).

The searches were saved as weekly auto alerts to be emailed to the library officer once a week. As the alerts are received the library officer locates the full text and makes a copy for display in the library. We chose to bind the copies in clear plastic reusable folders and put them on the rack with the new journals display. Since the demise of printed journals in favour of electronic journals we have plenty of available space on the new journal display rack. Articles are kept on display for a two week period and staff can come and view them or make copies of them on a weekly basis.

Once the full text copies are available for viewing the library officer collates all of the citations and emails them out on a pro forma email to the whole hospital, also on a weekly basis. The pro forma email contains information on how to request or obtain the full text and any necessary copyright information. Typically the “Staff Publications” email will contain an average of 5 citations per week. We decided that the emailed list needed to be brief as well as frequent so that people would come to expect its appearance regularly but would also not find it onerous to scan. Approximately 5 citations weekly was felt to be a good number as the list did not then become so long that people would put it aside to read later and subsequently forget about it. Typically requests for copies of the articles are received in the first two to three days after the email distribution so we are assuming we have this right.

When a hospital staff member requests a full text copy, the library officer makes a copy and posts or emails it to the staff member, taking into consideration any copyright procedures that have to be followed. The number of requests received from each weekly list averages ten.

In order to promote the service all new staff and students on a library orientation tour are shown the display. This always creates a lot of interest. Students and new and junior staff like to see what their senior staff are writing about, for obvious reasons.

As soon as the service was started several staff were quite worried that their more recent publications might be “missed out” and that their work would not be on show. These staff came down with lists of their recent works to ensure that they were put on display. This highlighted how important it is to the staff to be seen and acknowledged.

Much to our initial surprise the service was an instant success with many requests being made and many unsolicited positive feedback comments received. It was clear that many of our users valued being recognised for their work.

• “Please keep them coming, I for one love them.”
• “Thanks for taking the time to send [these] out to busy people like me who don’t get time to go to the library much”

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- "This is a great idea! I find receiving this type of email from you very helpful in updating CV's and notifying staff of recent publications. Well done and a great initiative."
- "Thankyou, what a great list - so good to know what the output is from TQE!

In conclusion, the service was easy to set up and once the search strategies are in place, the service is easily managed by the library clerical officer. The QEH library clerical officer has enjoyed this part of her work as it has brought her into more direct contact with the professional hospital staff. From the perspective of the Library, the focus has been very positive. The Library users are pleased to have their publications recognised by their institution and many call in just to make sure their publication is on display. Having the articles on display next to a reading area with comfy chairs has meant that many are browsed for interest along with new issues of the Lancet, NEJM and newspapers, thus, fostering a greater feeling of institutional self worth.

Finally, in a time when we are providing more and more services via the remote desktop, hospital staff find less and less reason to come and visit us. Not only has this service increased the rate of visits again, despite being largely operated by email, but it has also focused on a service that is undeniably from the Library and this has heightened our profile.

Whilst similar displays of authors' works have been done in the past, the key to the clear success of this service is the ready availability of the list via email and the timely provision of the full text articles by the library clerical officer.

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