Information Seeking Behaviour of Medical Practitioners: A Study of Majha Region of Punjab

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the information seeking patterns of medical practitioners; their information searching techniques and channels, difficulties in the way of information gathering, familiarity with, and use of e-resources, purpose and frequency of using information sources etc. The purpose is to know how medical practitioners spare time from their busy schedule for meeting their information needs, especially in the light of e-resources.

Key Terms: Information Seeking Pattern, Information Seeking Behaviour, e-Resources, Medical Practitioners, Doctors.

INTRODUCTION

For meeting the information needs, users seek information from various sources. Users from a specified community have similar information needs, through various factors such as qualification, experience, accessibility, cost, availability etc. affect the approaches of different individuals. However, overall observation of information gathering habits of people associated with a particular field provides a frame for studying their information seeking patterns. Moreover, the emergence of technology has drastically changed the information seeking behaviour of users. The medical field is no exception in this case. Doctors are regular users of information technology. This paper tries to study the information seeking the pattern of medical practitioners in the electronic era from the Majha region of Punjab (India).

Information seeking behaviour studies the efforts and approaches made by the users for meeting their information needs. It is “the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking, the individual may interact with manual information systems, or with computer-based systems.”

NEED & SCOPE

In the world of information explosion, none can grow and survive in a dynamic and competitive world without information. Information should be timely, relevant and effective. The medical field is very vast and deep-rooted. The medical professionals need to know about the latest updates and developments in their field in the form of latest research, diagnostic techniques, new tools etc. at the global level. Therefore, this study is selected to know information seeking pattern of medical practitioners of Majha region of Punjab, India.

There are four districts in Majha region of Punjab namely Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Gurdaspur, and Pathankot, but this study is restricted to the districts of Amritsar and Pathankot only. As a sample, 100 questionnaires were distributed among doctors in Amritsar and Pathankot. Eighty one questionnaires were received back, out of which 76 questionnaires were found fit for analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Thanus Kodi conducted a case study on the use of Internet and electronic resources for medical science information. Majority of the respondents were above 50 in age, out of the 54.68% were males and 45.23% were females. A majority of the respondents (40%) had below 2 hours access to the Internet whereas 7.82% have above 5 hours access to Internet. In case of a visit to the library, 31.25% of the respondents visited the library daily, and 10.31% twice a week. In case of respondents’ preference to medical databases, the respondents gave first preference to CD-ROM database on Highwire press, second to Ingenta and third to the utilization of database on Springer Link. Last preference was given to health Inter Network India. A majority of the respondents felt that virus was the main problem in accessing e-resources followed by lack of IT knowledge.
Davies undertook a comparative study of physicians of The United States, Canada, and United Kingdom; and their use of information\(^2\). The study found that 20% of UK, 13.8% of Canada and 1.3% physicians of The United States never used electronic resources for diagnosis. In case of use of e-resources for research, physicians from United States (51.3%) were leading followed by Canada (47.5%), and United Kingdom (26.3%). MEDLINE was the most used database by the Physicians i.e.US 81.4%, Canada 76.3%, and UK 76.5%. Umesh & Chandrashekara in their study on information seeking behaviour and searching behaviour of dental science professionals in Karnataka\(^1\) found that 97.40% of the respondents had access to the internet, and 64.40% were satisfied with speed of Internet. A majority of the respondents (91%) regularly used internet. Most of the dental science professionals (71.6%) felt that formal training of internet literacy was needed. Bhat & Mudhol in their study on the use of e-resources by the faculty members and students of Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Science (SKIMS)\(^1\) found that 57% of the respondents used internet for 3-4 hours. A majority of the respondents (58%) visited the library daily, and 36% of the respondents visited the library as and when required. A majority of the respondents used the Google search engine (wt. mean-4.01). The respondents found ‘virus’ as the biggest barrier in the way of accessing e-resources (wt. mean-4.00).

Kaur & Gill conducted a study on information seeking strategies of doctors of Ludhiana district (Punjab). The findings of the study revealed that a majority of the respondents sought information for ‘medical practice’ (81.67%) followed by ‘updating knowledge’ (80%). ‘Conferences’ were the important channel of information (93.33%) followed by web/internet (85%). The most preferred method of seeking information was that of ‘search engines’ (68.33%). The most preferred printed source was journals (81.67%).

### Objectives
- To assess the use of e-resources by the medical practitioners
- To know the problems faced by the medical practitioners
- To know factors motivating medical practitioners to use various channels of information
- To know various channels of information used by the doctors
- To examine information seeking strategies of the medical practitioners

### Data Analysis
- **Distribution of the Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>%age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>51.32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathankot</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48.68</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the district-wise distribution of respondents. It reveals that 51.32% of the respondents belong to Amritsar while 48.69% are from Pathankot. In gender majority of the respondents (55.26%) are male, whereas 44.74% are female.

- **Purpose of Seeking Information**

Table 2 shows that a majority of the respondents (72.36%) seek information for updating knowledge followed by medical practice (61.84%) and ‘research’ (48.68).

### Table 1: District and Gender-Wise Distribution of the Respondents

### Table 2: Purpose of Seeking Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical practice</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>61.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature retrieval</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For writing articles</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis writing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updating knowledge</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis information</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding information on specific diseases</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reveal that a majority of the respondents i.e. 69.73% use web/internet as the most used channel of information followed by subject experts (47.36%) and by attending conferences (42.10%). It indicates that medical practitioners are well versed with the latest information technology.

- **Factors Affecting the Way of Information Seeking**

### Table 4: Factors Affecting the Way of Information Seeking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity with the source</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>61.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness (for accuracy)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>69.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>68.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>53.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging (format)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 indicate various factors which are responsible for affecting the way of information seeking. It unfolds that a large number of the medical respondents (69.73%) feel that trustworthiness is the top-ranked reason followed by accessibility (68.42%), and ‘familiarity with the source’ (61.84%)

- **Frequency of Using the Internet**

### Table 5: Frequency of Using the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>84.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 show the frequency of using the internet by the medical respondents. A majority of the respondents (84.21%) use Internet weekly, followed by fortnightly with 11.84% and ‘daily’ with 2.63%.

- **Purpose of Using the Internet**

### Table 6: Purpose of using the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional interest</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>77.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>59.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>67.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downloading</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 reveal that a majority of the respondents (77.63%) use internet for ‘professional interest’ followed by ‘continuing education’ (67.10%), ‘downloading’ (65.78%) and ‘research’ (59.21%).

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1. Davies
2. Umesh & Chandrashekara
3. Kaur & Gill
4. Davies
5. Bhat & Mudhol
6. Umesh & Chandrashekara
7. Kaur & Gill
8. Davies
9. Bhat & Mudhol
10. Umesh & Chandrashekara
11. Kaur & Gill
Table 7 reveal that a majority of the respondents (63.15%) use open access journals to get up to date information in the field followed by to find related articles (51.31%) and easy to use (36.84%). The least preference goes to get research background data on a new problem (26.31%).

Table 8 provide results regarding the most frequently used open access journals in the medical field, it is found that most of the respondents (30.26%) use ‘Indian Journal of Medical Research’, followed by The New England Journal of Medicine (18.42%) and International Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences (IJMMS) (14.47%). The least preferred open access journal is ‘Online Journal of Medicine and Medical Science (OJMMSR)’ (3.94%).

Table 9 reveal that most of the respondents use databases to find current literature (52.63%) followed by fast and easy to use (43.42%) and for specific articles (42.10%). Least preferred reason for using databases is for related articles (19.73%).

Table 10 reveal that most of the respondents (67.10%) use Pubmed/Mesh database followed by Medscape reference (35.52%) and Cinahl (17.10%). ERIC database is the least used medical database by the medical practitioners.

Table 11 reveal that a majority of the respondents (55.26%) consider ‘lack of free access to information sources followed by ‘lack of time’ (47.36%) and ‘slow network’ (38.15%). Least number of respondents (23.68%) mentioned that using e-resources often distract from doing work.

**FINDINGS**

- Most of the respondents seek information for updating their knowledge.
- A majority of the respondents use ‘web/internet’ as the most used channel of information.
- A majority of the respondents spend 1-10 hours per week for using print and e-information.
- A large number of the respondents (73.68%) get their needed information from libraries.
- Most of the respondents use databases to find current literature.
- PubMed/Mesh database is widely used by the doctors.

**Comments by the respondents**

- Free internet facility should be provided in government medical hospitals.
- Libraries should provide more online sources.
- Libraries should organize some training programmes for the doctors to make them aware of different databases available with them.
- Medical libraries should be connected with the national network for the sharing of information.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude we can say that doctors being very busy professionals, and by performing multifold responsibilities toward society try to make themselves up to date with the latest research and developments in their field. For empowering the information seekers, libraries should organize information literacy programmes for this community, so that available information sources in the field may be best utilized.
REFERENCES


