Partnerships in academic libraries: the librarian in research teams

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Introduction and aim. Partnerships between libraries and research teams have become an established part of the academic libraries’ portfolio of services. It is also a part of the Medical Library Association’s official policy statement. The Medical Library at Aalborg University Hospital initiated the project “Research Librarian” to study and develop the library’s research support as a core service. Though research support is well incorporated in our daily service, we wanted to structure and enhance it as a complete package solution.

Methods. In the study we formed partnerships with researchers from three medical specialties; Cardiology, Nuclear Medicine and Psychiatry with the projects “Lung cancer”, “New oral anticoagulants” and “Clozapine”. The three projects were all initiated with meetings between researchers and librarians to identify the information needs using PICO and from that point the librarians handled the searches. We suggested relevant databases and filled in forms with search terms and synonyms for each database and sent them to the researchers for approval. After performing the searches we imported the files to RefWorks and removed duplicates. Eventually we outlined search protocols and presented the results in flowcharts. To evaluate the outcome of the project we conducted semi-structured interviews with the participating researchers.

Results. The participants valued our partnership because it strengthened the scientific basis in their research projects by providing more exhaustive and well-documented searches in more databases. Usually the researchers themselves performed random searches with only few search terms in one database. The researchers accepted the increased workload associated with the larger result sets, because of the higher quality. By participating in this project we have become increasingly experienced with a wider selection of databases, as in the past we usually included only few databases in our searches. Furthermore we developed filters for specific document types in some databases for future use. Our findings were outlined in a “cookbook” in order to document and facilitate future librarian-researcher partnerships. It contains chronological checklists and templates for search protocols and flowcharts. The different procedures are presented in text as well as in graphics.

Conclusions. This project has made it evident to the researchers that the medical library provides research support as a package solution. Our work and expert knowledge is time-saving for the researchers and improves the quality of their projects. Prospectively we want to use our “cookbook” to promote our research support and offer a more consistent service to the researchers.