Working in the health information profession: perspectives, experiences and trends – The results of an EAHIL funded 25th anniversary project

Barbara Sen, Robert Villa, Elizabeth Chapman

Information School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk
r.villa@sheffield.ac.uk
e.chapman@sheffield.ac.uk

**Aim.** To record the stories and experiences of health information professionals practicing across Europe

**Methods.** Interviews, surveys, and focus groups were used to gather data in order to understand the diversity and range of roles in the health information sector, and the critical nature of those roles in supporting effective healthcare. We conducted focus groups and interviews in Sheffield, York, and Stockholm. The focus groups and interviews informed the survey design.

**Discussion.** The survey produced 513 fully completed responses from 32 countries across Europe and beyond. A further 146 partially completed responses were received. Preliminary analysis shows a predominantly female workforce, 429 females and 77 males, with 5 people not disclosing their gender. There is a spread of ages within the profession, not an aging workforce. Most respondents work in state healthcare (273), or in education (186), with 30 working in the charity and voluntary sector, 21 in industry, 17 in private healthcare, and 55 in other organisations. The respondents have a wide range of job titles many identified as “library”, “information” or “knowledge” roles. The main user groups identified were students, doctors, researchers, nurses and allied health professionals, with very few providing services to patients or the public. The respondents are engaged in a wide range of roles. Many are predominantly traditional such as literature searching, teaching, user support, collection development. Top challenges are reducing budgets, problems with time and workload, and too many priorities. People identified key skills they needed in their jobs. They acquired these skills mainly in the workplace, at library school, and from life experience. Only 28% have acquired their skills via online learning. Technical skills are high on the list of development needs. Many respondents felt they made an impact for example in times of war supplying frontline and hospital staff with literature on war injuries. Providing quality literature and evidence was identified as making a clear contribution either directly or indirectly.

**Conclusions.** The changing healthcare context provides challenges. Our roles have developed, encompassing these challenges, often embracing technologies and pushing the boundaries of traditional library roles. This study enhances our understanding of the complexity of the domain, how it is evolving and impacting on healthcare.