The development of a medical library at Mostar University School of Medicine and the Medical Libraries Network in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract

The principal aim of this paper is to describe the development of a library for a school of medicine for an institution endowed with moderate resources. Furthermore, the development of a network of medical libraries in an underdeveloped transitional country like Bosnia and Herzegovina is discussed in detail. In its main part, this paper presents our strategy, concept development, and the importance of librarians' retraining. All major achievements are listed, followed by suggestions and recommendations.

Keywords: medical education, medical library, internet, international cooperation, tempus project, European Union, national library network

Introduction

The contemporary medical library is a place, not a virtual reality. It will include connections, links, access, outreach, distance learning, and education as well as books, journals, media, and databases. The successful library of the future will consist of a delicate balance between materials that are owned and those that are accessed [1].

Mostar Medical School [2] was established in 1997. The priority of the school officials was then to define the curriculum, organize the admittance exam for the first generation of students, and elect the teaching faculty for the first year of study. From the very beginning, we were aware that an institution without a library cannot exist as an academic institution, and we focused all efforts to establish one. Due to the fact that the recent war in BiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina) caused considerable damage to both human and material resources, a library system was nonexistent when we started with the project. Mostar was among the cities, which libraries were completely destroyed [3], [4], [5], [6].

In the year 1998, we applied a project proposal to the European Commission Tempus program. The project was granted with 166,000 €, the contract was signed in February 1999, and in April 1999, we started implementing the project. The project consortium consisted of:

- Andalusian School of Public Health (Granada, Spain)
- Help the Children Fund (Cork, Ireland)
Project affiliated institutions were:

- Banja Luka University School of Medicine (BiH)
- Ghent University School of Medicine (Belgium)
- Sarajevo University School of Medicine (BiH)
- Serb Sarajevo University School of Medicine (BiH)
- Semmelweis University (Budapest, Hungary)

Project's objectives

Accordingly, following the principal goal to establish a contemporary medical library and to share whatever accomplished with all medical faculties in BiH, we divided the project in several specific objectives:

- installing a small collection of core "must have" textbooks
- installing a collection of core journals, based predominantly on those available electronically
- equipping the library with integrated software
- developing an internet-based biomedical information retrieval system
- establishing a consistent document delivery system to all BiH libraries
- education/retraining of BiH librarians for the 21st century as well as mass education of library users

Education and Training

The program for BiH medical librarian education/retraining was based on international visiting teachers, learning in "blocks of knowledge" performed on weekend seminars, permanent assessment and final certification. For this training we developed a new curriculum, in order to reach the essential core knowledge and needed skills. Training was organized in twelve sessions, executed over condensed weekend seminars: Introductory lecture, technical environment, library organization, library management, collection development, journal management, classification schemes, cataloguing, databases, information retrieval, library services and scientometrics.

Project timeframe

Beside the training, which was extended over two years, the rest of the project implementation was achieved in three years, as shown in Table 1. At the end of the project in Mostar we had a new facility, established in the small building on the university campus (approximately 200 m²), provided by the university. In four rooms we organized shelves for journals (Figure 1, Figure 2) and books (Figure 3), in one room a reception desk and public service (equipped with computer). Five terminals serve the public for internet searches, for Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) searching, for using books borrowing facilities and for the librarian staff running the library (Figure 4). The hospital administration is officially informed about the new facility and the services it offers. A project's website was developed in English (project language) and Croatian with the intention to inform the public about events, contents, news and particular project documents [11].

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Project concept

We were aware that a reasonable approach is to lean on global information networks and to aim to become a part of international librarian's "visible colleges". In short, our goal was to provide users (our teaching staff, students but medical personnel, too) with full and easy access to information, combined with the possibility of interlibrary loans and the acquisition of photocopies at reasonable costs [7], [8], [9], [10].

The project concept was developed based on well known facts:

- Traditional, 19th century style libraries with huge collections of books and journals are fast becoming relics.
- A library's purpose is not only to house the collection but to provide access to all information needed.
- The library of the 21st century is to become a virtual one, it's "collection" and information is not held on shelves but worldwide.

Following the above mentioned principles we decided to organize a small and modest facility which will be

- fully integrated - locally, nationally and globally,
- able to serve as the center of academic life,
- administered by librarians who have to be re-educated and
- users who have to be educated on information retrieval skills, too.

In spite of the fact that our project was applied exclusively for the development of a medical library at Mostar University, we decided when the project was granted to extend our efforts to all five schools of medicine in BiH, knowing well that all of them are in real need. Our offer to establish a network and re-educate librarians was accepted with enthusiasm by authorities in all schools.
The library premises are dislocated from the school so that students are disabled to use library during their breaks. During the first five years of our existence we had several very difficult moments mostly shared with other members of our university. The main problem was the security of the facilities. This has now been solved, i.e. has been put on higher level, but unfortunately before that we suffered great damage when the web server with the library’s software and the copy machine have been stolen.

After finishing the Tempus Project our library doesn’t have any financial aid/assets and its position is quite complex and hard to run. This fact could be justified with the fact that the building of the school of medicine is under construction and so these big investments request a lot of money.

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### Summary of Achievements

The most important achievements of this project could be summarized in the following lines:

- The small library is established, working space reconstructed and furnished.
Accomplishment related to human resources

When we take into consideration BIH librarian as a target group, they acquired a new knowledge and new updated skills, requested by medical librarianship of a new era. If we consider the benefits gained by the teaching staff, students and medical professionals, all of them benefited considerably - improvement from no library and no information access to full information access speak for itself.

From the stage of almost total deprivation of information, they reached the level of high-quality and cost-effective access to information, close to the opportunities existing in advanced academic institutions. This project can be described as a key program in building a sound academic institution in Mostar, and the cooperation level we reached with our partners from the EU are instrumental for the school of medicine’s development. It is possible to clearly state that without such assistance the development would still be in a very rudimentary phase.

Present time and the future

When we speak about the medical library only, in Mostar we plan to increase the number of staff and to extend the working hours - this is the main demand of our clients. On a national level, there is plenty of room for improvement of cooperation. At present, we have three more EU supported projects running: "Dictum" is aimed at reforming the curriculum, "Intel M" is devoted to the introduction of new teaching methodologies in medical education and "QuMaMed" will assist the development of quality management structures in schools of medicine. What is important, all those benefits are shared with all medical schools in BIH, and every year we enlarge our pool of European partners. Beside German, Spanish, Hungarian and Belgian now Austrian, Italian, Irish, Danish and Sweden partners joined our consortium. We believe this is a proper index of the work done so far.

References

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