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Awareness and Usage of National Library of Medicine Classification (NLMC) System in Health Libraries in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The present study addresses NLMC use in Sri Lankan Health and Medical libraries. The objectives of this study were to investigate whether NLMC is used in Sri Lankan Health and Medical libraries and awareness about NLMC among health and Medical Librarians. Also, it was aimed to find out the present classification system/s and possibilities for future alterations. The participants of this study were all the Librarians who are in-charge of Health and Medical Libraries in Sri Lanka who are the members of the HELLIS Network Sri Lanka. A descriptive survey was applied for data collection. An open-ended questionnaire and interview were conducted after relevant literature review. Results of this study showed that majority of Medical Librarians who are in Sri Lankan Medical libraries rarely used the NLMC for their cataloguing purposes. The study summarized NLMC is not popular among medical libraries in Sri Lanka, due to lack of awareness of the system and the influence of the mother institute or lack of popularity of the system within the country. This study suggests that LIS education system in Sri Lanka has to pay more attention towards NLMC to include LIS curricula.

Keywords: Library Classification Systems, National Library Medicine Classification System, Health and Medical Libraries, Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) classification system is a library classification system, which covers the field of medicine and preclinical basic sciences. NLMC contains clear division between preclinical and clinical topics and it contains highly enumerative structure and support mnemonics (Parker, 2007). According to Giustini (2014) "The genesis of the NLM classification" was a survey of the Army Medical Library, published in 1944, which recommended that the 'Library be reclassified according to a modern scheme' and that new scheme be a mixed notation (letters and numbers) resembling that of Library of Congress.

Many hospital libraries and medical libraries all over the world use National Library of Medical Classification system because this classification is specially tailored for biomedical literature. As an annually updated, well-organized classification system, it covers the main subjects of medical and health related books. Though most of the health and medical libraries use NLMC for classifying books, it seems that Sri Lankan Medical and Health libraries are not adopting this system yet. Therefore, it is very important to study about present status of usage and awareness on NLMC and future trends towards it, which will be helpful in incorporating the resources with other medical and health libraries worldwide.

2. Literature Review

Few studies have been found in relation to use of NLMC in Health Libraries in Asian countries though there were some studies conducted in other regions. Also there were only very limited literature in recent years. No literature was found in this regard in Sri Lanka.

According to Scheerer and Hines (1974) generally accepted classifications in medical libraries were (by date of origin), Dewey Decimal Classification-1876 (currently updated), Boston Medical Library Classification, 1879 (no longer updated), Library of Congress Classification, 1910 (currently updated), Cunningham Classification

(1929 no longer updated) and National Library of Medicine Classification, 1951 (currently updated). Though medical classification systems such as Cunningham Classification System and Boston Medical Classification system have been used over the years, they have moved to NLM due to number of advantages. Apart from the merits of the NLM Classification system for organizing bio medical literature in to a useful shelf arrangement, the medical librarians who had also switched from other classification schemes to the NLM Classification System cited many other factors. These advantages: frequent updates; currency, availability of cataloguing Information through OCLC, availability of Subject Headings (Medical Subject Headings -MESH), ease of application, simplicity of Notation, appropriateness for use in large and small libraries, correlation with the LC schedules, feasibility of converting from other systems.

Womack (2006) had studied about the classification systems used in academic health libraries in Boston. According the findings majority of libraries have used the NLM classification scheme. Her findings revealed that 42.5% use the NLM classification exclusively while some libraries use it in addition to one or more systems. It further stated that the additional system is used for a part of a collection, such as government documents or audiovisual materials. For most libraries, the main factor for selecting NLM classification was that this system is the most detailed, most appropriate for a medical collection, and that it provides the best coverage for the subject area.

3. Objectives

The main objective is to investigate whether NLMC is used in Sri Lankan Health and Medical libraries and awareness about NLMC among health and medical Librarians. Also, it was aimed to find out the present classification system/s and possibilities for future alterations.

4. Methodology

Survey method was employed as the research method. The population of this study consisted of all the Librarians in-charge of Health and

Medical Libraries in Sri Lanka who are the members of HELLIS Network Sri Lanka. The total membership of HELLIS as at 01/08/2016 was 27, which included academic, special, governmental as well as non-governmental libraries. Also World Health Organization Library was included into the sample as it is a prominent and sponsoring agent of HELLIS Network Sri Lanka. The whole population was considered as the sample (N=100). The sample consisted of 15 academic libraries, 05 special/ research libraries, 06 government libraries and 01 non-governmental libraries.

A questionnaire and interviews were used as data collection instruments. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was administered to the Medical and Health Librarians included in the sample. Also interviews (over the phone) were conducted in order to get clarifications about some questions. The questionnaire and the interviews were focused on getting data on present classification system/s used, the reasons and awareness on NLM and their willingness for future applications.

Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2016 and SPSS (version 22) software packages. Variables related; type of the libraries, professional qualifications and experience, awareness of NLM and usage patterns were analyzed using non-parametric statistical tests. Rate of response was 89%.

5. Results

According to demographic data, 22% of respondents were male librarians and 78% were females. 65% of the respondents possess experience of more than 10 years. 74% of the respondents have obtained postgraduate qualifications in (MA/MSSc/MLS/MIM) while others are Diploma holders. According to results, a majority (52%) of health libraries use DDC (Dewey Decimal classification) while 35% of responded libraries use UDC (Universal Decimal classification). Only 03 libraries in the sample out of 23 (13%) use NLMC. It was found that 39% of respondents were not aware of the NLMC. 61% of respondents have known about the existence and structure of NLMC but they do not use it. None of the medical librarians in the sample

have learnt about NLMC at Diploma/undergraduate/postgraduate levels in LIS education. Almost all the respondents have completed Diploma or postgraduate studies in Library and Information Science. Also no training has been obtained by none of the respondents on NLMC. When asked for future applications only two librarians preferred to go for NLMC near future. Others stated that without any knowledge, it is difficult to convert the existing system and they preferred to continue with the existing system. All the respondents have expressed their willingness in getting a training on NLMC or to learn NLMC.

6. Conclusions

Based on the results it can be concluded that though NLMC is specifically designed for biomedical literature and used by Health and Medical Libraries all over the world, it is not adopted by the majority of Sri Lankan Health and Medical libraries. This may be due to lack of awareness of the system, influence of the mother institute or lack of popularity of the system within Sri Lanka. It seems that though a majority of librarians possess more than 10 year experience still they have not learnt or not aware of NLM classification system. Also it can be concluded that most are reluctant to change from the existing systems.

7. Recommendations

The present study suggests and recommends that awareness of NLMC among Health Librarians should be developed. Since most of the librarians in Health and medical libraries are not subject specialists, it would be easier to use NLMC. HELLIS Network can play a major role in providing training on NLMC. Though all the respondents are holders of either Diploma or postgraduate degrees in LIS, it seems that there is a gap in knowledge about such specialized classification schemes. Therefore, this study suggests that LIS education system in Sri Lanka has to pay attention towards this to include NLMC in curricula. However, more in-depth studies should be conducted before

making suggestions in converting to the existing systems used by Health and medical libraries to NLMC.

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