

Norwegian medical librarians' views about the future

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Abstract

The article describes Norwegian medical librarians' thoughts about trends and future developments. Results from a survey among library staff in medical and healthcare libraries in Norway in June 2022 are presented. Digital development, teaching and research support were highly emphasised, as well as the importance of physical library space, collaboration with own institution, and the library's impact. Furthermore, the librarians also registered their competency needs within teaching and education, first line support, open science, evidence syntheses, and in cooperation and management. Our project indicates that employees in medical and health libraries are aware of trends and competency needs. These competency needs are essential to be addressed to providers of continuing education in order to offer relevant library services.

Key words: librarians; libraries, medical; professional competence; Norway.

Introduction

A decade ago, the *Health Information and Libraries Journal* started an article series about international trends in Health Science Libraries. Three reviews called Global trends in health science libraries published in 2021 and 2022 summarized the results from the different publications (1-3). They identified eleven trend areas: systematic reviews and data synthesis, education and training, research support, technology, users' experience and engaging with the public, collaboration and partnership, library space, new roles and challenges for library staff.

Later, the world has experienced the COVID pandemic from 2020. This has affected the libraries, regarding delivery and type of services provided in a digital and physical library setting. A report from the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Research Planning and Review Committee from 2022 (4), about changes in the US libraries "attempts to provide a snapshot of developments worth noting". Changes in library staffing, space utilization and collaborative collections due to tighter budgets, are seen in the sector. Furthermore, the report points to trends like the open access movement and artificial intelligence (AI) that will continue to develop.

This article aims to show how Norwegian medical librarians think about trends and future developments.

In the project "Competencies for the librarian in the future" (5) we ran a survey among library staff in medical and healthcare libraries in Norway in June 2022. We received 102 answers from librarians. Nearly 70% of the respondents were working in libraries in higher education. The rest of the respondents were working in hospital libraries, for the health authorities or in other research institutions. Two open-ended questions in the survey were about trends and areas of development for the next five years, both for the individual librarian and for the library.

Where will you be in five years' time?

The first question about trends and the future was directed towards the respondents' current position. For their own position, library employees highlight areas related to digital skills and development, teaching, and research support. All citations were in Norwegian and are translated into English by the authors.

A majority pointed out digital topics such as artificial intelligence, algorithms, and new technology. One librarian said: "artificial intelligence associated with the automation of systematic literature searches will be important in the next years". Other comments were related to digital learning resources, digital sources, and new teaching methods. "Use the best from digital opportunities and take it further" stated one respondent.

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Further, one librarian wrote "Keep up to date on new good tools that are relevant for our users in research". Several respondents stated that digital competency will be the most important in the future. One of the respondents meant "we have to be digitally literate", which sums it all up.

Most respondents emphasised that teaching information literacy will continue to be important in the future, delivered both in classroom and on digital platforms. One librarian mentioned: "Physical teaching will continue to be important, even if some believe that it is a trend for us to become more digital". Another stated: "Balance physical and digital teaching, and do not think that 'making a video for everything' is the solution". Several librarians mentioned flipped classroom and learning as upcoming trends. The development of digital services for distance education students including online courses, and distance learning are becoming more common in higher education. One mentioned the embedded librarian and wanted "more focus on library integration in the education and faculty".

Several respondents mentioned a shift from student focus to research support focus during the next five years, pointing out that "Research support is becoming more important". Research support, especially engagement in systematic literature searches and knowledge summaries, and closer involvement of librarians in the research process, were answers given.

One respondent stated: "It is important to have domain knowledge in the job to support the various professional environments" and another said: "Focus on quality in all stages of a research project". The embedded librarian as an integrated partner in research projects is also mentioned as one trend: helping and supporting with research data management, publishing, and storing in repositories. A respondent hoped for a more integrated librarian in all projects.

For summing up what librarians in medical and health-care libraries in Norway mentioned about their future work, we can cite one librarian "That we embrace our pedagogical role more, that we venture into new areas of competence and dare to take up a little more space in the institution". They also want to improve their digital competencies about technological developments in artificial intelligence and being on top of developments in delivering services for systematic reviews and open sciences as an embedded librarian.

What should the library focus on for the next five years?

For the library, also issues like digital development and research support were highlighted. The word "digital" was heavily used in the answers in this section of the survey. Terms like digital teaching, digital meetings, digital resources and sources, digital format, digital development, digital opportunities, digital support services, digital learning resources, digital meeting places, digital platforms, digital competence and the more general digitisation, were mentioned as important issues now and in the future. As one of the respondents stated: "we have to develop ourselves digitally together with our users".

However, the importance of library visibility was strongly emphasised. This includes visibility within your own organisation, communication of the value of the library, and show the library's impact. Library visibility is important, especially in situations where budget cuts and downsizing are likely to happen. Strategic work to ensure annual budgets and keep access to relevant resources are mentioned several times. One respondent stated: "The library's position – and existence – in the organisation is threatened. Marketing of the library's services throughout the organisation is important". Another said: "The library's added value for the organisation should be highlighted".

Respondents emphasised that both the employees' skills and competencies, and library services ought to be promoted. One librarian stated: "The human resource should be important in the next five years: what can library staff with their expertise contribute to, that no one else can?"

Many respondents mentioned the importance of the library as a physical place. The library should continue to be an attractive gathering and meeting point, where learning can take place assisted by library employees; "Further develop the library as a gathering point. To work for a stronger embedding of the library services in the institution, with regard to resources of staff, physical space, subscriptions, ...".

Competencies for the librarian in the future

In the survey we asked for preferred areas for librarians to build their own competencies. There are many competency needs within teaching and education, first line

support, open science, evidence syntheses, and in co-operation and management.

Nearly 70% answered that they wanted to increase their competence about new technologies and how to use this technology in their own work. The respondents also wished for competence about new trends and development both in library and information science, and in medicine and healthcare.

About 63% wanted more competence in communication and methods to highlight the library's value. Half of the respondents wanted to learn more about evaluation methods and methods to improve library services, as well as how to market the library's offers and services.

The competency needs mentioned by the respondents are essential to be addressed to providers of continuing education for offering relevant library services.

Conclusion

Comparing with the eleven trends identified in the articles from the Health Information & Libraries Journal (1-3), we find that the trends and future development stated from the Norwegian health librarians are very similar. Digital development, teaching and research support were highly emphasized, as well as the importance of physical library space and collaboration within one's own institution. These issues seem to be trends all over the library world.

The ACRL (4) reports trends like the open access movement and artificial intelligence (AI). These are issues that the Norwegian librarians also stated as important. In a literature review about AI and the library role, Gasparini & Kautonen conclude that libraries should have a role between the technology and the library users. The libraries can take on roles as neutral investigators, responsible agents, or agents of desirable change (6).

With these thoughts about the future for the library and the librarians, we will conclude with a voice from one Norwegian librarian: "We should not only be aware of new trends, we should be a little ahead". Continuing to balance the work environment between the physical

and the virtual library with a high emphasis on technological innovations for delivering library services, is important.

Our project indicates that employees in medical and health libraries are aware of trends and competency needs, and that the librarians show great interest in professional development. National and international organisations for professional development, like EAHIL, along with library and information education, are important stakeholders for building needed competencies for the librarian in the future.

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