The Canadian research-embedded health librarian experience: Results of a mixed methods study

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Background

Different models of embedded librarianship represented in the literature.

Research-embedded librarians – 2 case studies


Librarians embedded in health research specifically – 0 articles

Who are they, and what do they do that distinguishes them from other librarians?
Definition of an REHL

Participates in research team(s) rather than focusing on traditional library management and services

AND

Provides tailored, intensive information services to the health research team (or teams) with which s/he is integrated
Research Question

What is the current REHL experience in Canada?

• Via descriptive qualitative analysis of REHL focus groups, we will be able to identify themes related to REHL identity, contributions and challenges.
Methods

Mixed-methods approach in 2 phases:

Phase 1: Quantitative investigation
- Online survey of Canadian Health Librarians
- March-April 2011
- 39 REHL responses

Phase 2: Qualitative investigation
- Focus groups (face to face and online) of REHLs
- May-June 2011
- 13 REHLs interviewed
Results: Job Titles of REHLs

Number of Responses

- Librarian: 14
- Information Specialist: 12
- Research/Analyst: 8
- Other*: 4
## Frequency of Job Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Infrequently</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature Searching</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending research team meetings</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature analysis, scoping, summarizing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General reference services</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horizon scanning/Current awareness</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing/Editing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction/Teaching</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducting original research</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data management, extraction or analysis</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications /Knowledge translation</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical or digital library management</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Records management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff or trainee supervision</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
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</table>
Size of Research Team

Number of Responses

Number of Researchers in Regular User Group

- 1 - 5: 18
- 6 - 15: 12
- 16 - 30: 6
- > 30: 0
Profession of Supervisor

Number of Responses

- Librarian: 14 responses
- Non-librarian: 18 responses
- Both (co-supervised): 6 responses
REHL Identity

“I just have much more of an intimate relationship and I wouldn’t consider the people I work with my users. I would consider them more my coworkers. I am part of the team there really, and provide much more specialized services.

I actually have in my career a few times had a professional crisis of, ‘Am I even a librarian anymore? Can I even call myself that?’
Importance of Champions

“[They] are really absolute about an information specialist being a part of their research team, and that it is an essential person to their team. And...when they do presentations or talks they will actually make that really clear and sort of publicly declare that. So I think they kind of move other people over to that view.”
Challenges

“I feel cut off….I don’t get enough stimulation as a librarian, and the librarian issues around librarianship that relate to research. I think it would be wonderful to have a group—like all the people who are on the phone today to form some sort of group, where we could address issues that we all come across, kind of learn from each other. I think that would be really helpful....I feel like I’m kind of in limbo: I’m in research, but I’m in the middle.”
Opportunities

“I guess I’d just like to say that I absolutely adore my job. I wouldn’t trade it for all the tea in China. It’s just great. It’s so exciting, always different, I’m always learning things...so, from that respect I am extremely happy.”

One of the things that I think about with the research-embedded librarians, is that it’s growing...there’s lots of opportunities there....I’m really interested in raising the awareness of new students coming out, that there are jobs in this field, and lots of them, possibly more than there are traditional librarian jobs.
Typical Canadian REHL Experience

- Research-grant funded position
- Works with team of 1-5 researchers
- Conducts literature searching, scoping, analysis, and writing. Rarely involved in physical library management.
- Derives great satisfaction from her position
- Feels some isolation from traditional health librarianship
- Struggles to find and/or attend relevant CE
Implications & Conclusions

- Profile of REHL differs from non-embedded HLs
- Hybrid ID as researcher/librarian is key;
- LIS world could support this population better during MLIS programs, CE opportunities, and networking/support.
- Fields beyond health that assume an “evidence imperative” may see similar growth of research-embedded librarians.
I think it’s really fun to provide a high level of service to a small group of people, as opposed to—I don’t want to say a low level of service, but I would say a very surface level of service to a large group of people—and frankly to some people who don't care....[T]o work with really smart, highly motivated people who really care about what they do, and are interested in what you do, is very rewarding.”
Thank You

Maria Ospina from the Institute of Health Economics

Supporters:

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Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada

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Northern Alberta Health Libraries Association

HLA-BC
Health Libraries Association of British Columbia