

13th Annual Meeting of the International Society of Technology Assessment in Health Care (ISTAHC). Barcelona, Spain, 1997.

A view of the quality of Spanish hospitals: Their libraries

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Abstract

Purpose: Hospital libraries (HL) contribute to hospital quality by meeting information needs of medical staff and other health professionals for patient care, education, research, and management. The purpose of this study is to describe relevant aspects of Spanish HLs as a part of hospital structural quality.

Methods: Cross sectional study of Spanish public hospitals > 100 beds, or smaller with teaching accreditation. All these hospitals were asked if they had a library according to the following operational definition: "Organized collection of books and periodic publications in health sciences, with at least one person who facilitates the use of such documents in a specific physical area." A questionnaire was mailed to the identified HLs and followed up by telephone. Data collection was completed in January 1996.

Results: A total of 314 hospitals were identified, of which 211 had their own library (67%), and 37 hospitals without a library (12%) received services from the library of another hospital or center. Thus, 79% of the selected hospitals had access to a library in 1995. This proportion was 92% for teaching hospitals and 50% for non-teaching hospitals, and increased with hospital size: 67% (100/150) for >250 beds; 85% (77/91) for 251-500 beds; 95% (38/40) for 501-750 beds; and 100% (33/33) for >750 beds. Of the 211 HLs, 169 responded to the questionnaire (response rate: 80%). Selected findings from the study show that only 66% of HLs have empty shelving space available for new documents, 86% have a telephone, 21% a fax machine, 69% a photocopy machine, 87% a computer, 80% a CD-ROM (66% Medline), 19% a modem, and 13% have access to Internet. Cataloging rules exist in 72% of HLs, and 74% have a classification system. Literature searching is available in 54%. Each HL has, on average, 1240 books (SD=1324) and 145 periodicals (SD=163). Only 104 (62%) HLs request documents from other libraries, and 65 (38%) send documents. Average staffing per HL is 1.1 librarians and 0.8 support staff. The head librarian is a qualified librarian in 46% of the libraries.

Conclusions: A large proportion (20%) of hospitals do not have access to a library. The hospital libraries have important structural and functional deficits, as well as a low degree of cooperation. Improvements in these areas will enable libraries to make a better contribution to the quality of Spanish hospitals.

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