

TITLE: More research is needed to show which types of publicity are effective in getting GPs to use the library

Bottom Line

A randomized controlled trial to determine if a library visit to a GP at their practice is more effective than sending them an email, in terms of library service promotion, was inconclusive due to a small number of participants

Focused Question: Is a visit to rural GPs at their practice more effective (in terms of library use) at promoting library services, than sending them an email?

Citation: Increasing the rural general practitioners' use of library and information services through publicity: a randomized controlled trial in Cornwall, UK. Oak K, Gegg R. Health Info Libr J. 2008 Sep;25(3):208-17.

Summary of the aim and methods of the study

- The aim of this randomised controlled trial (RCT) was to determine which method of library promotion was most effective – a single visit to a GP practice, or a single email to the GP manager. A secondary aim was to determine which information sources GPs in Cornwall use, and why they don't use the library – this aim seems to have arisen after the RCT was completed, due to very low library usage by the GPs
- 76 GP practices in Cornwall were stratified according to number of GPs in each practice, and randomized in blocks of 6 practices to one of 3 groups – a) an unscheduled visit by a librarian to the practice to advertise library services, b) an email sent to the GP highlighting library services or c) no intervention. It was not clear for Group b) whether each individual GP received an email, or just the Practice Manager.

- The practices were clustered so that all GPs at the same practice received the same intervention, to minimize communication between the 3 intervention groups
- The outcome stated was ‘use of the library’ as measured by books borrowed, photocopies made, interlibrary loans, search requests and general enquiries – although the actual outcome measured appeared to be *number of GPs* using the library services.
- A simple, brief questionnaire asking where they look for health-related information and why they do not currently use the library, was sent to all 332 GPs in Cornwall.

Main Results

- Table 1 showed number of GPs using the library for each intervention – 6.9% (7 GPs) used library from ‘visit’ group, 1.0% (1 GP) from ‘email’ group and 0.8% (1 GP) from control.
- The odds ratio for each group was calculated, and showed that the odds of a GP using the library were 11 times greater for the ‘visit’ group than the control group. However the number of GPs using the library was so small that the confidence interval (CI) was very large, meaning that the results are not precise
- 138 of the 332 questionnaires were returned (response rate of 42%)
- Library users were significantly more likely (18% more likely, $p=0.003$) to seek information from colleagues than non-library users were
- Online databases were found to be the next most popular information source for GPs, and GPs who use the library service are more likely to use these databases than non-users (23.5% more likely, $p=0.003$)
- The authors conclude that their RCT on how best to promote library services is inconclusive due to the very small numbers of GPs using the library during the trial.

Comments:

- Important topic for research, and a RCT was the correct study method to use
- Mostly easy to follow the details of the article, use of tables and figures helped to clarify
- The exact outcomes being measured were not entirely clear – was it number of GPs or events such as book borrowing and ILLs?
- No information about the GPs was given – age, gender etc?
- The small numbers of GPs using the library meant that the trial results were inconclusive, but by additionally sending out a questionnaire to the GPs the authors managed to obtain some useful data on sources of information used
- No cost estimation for the interventions was given – individual visits to GP practices would be very costly in comparison with sending emails

Appraised by: Oxford Librarians Jan 2009