COUNTRY REPORTS: GLOBAL HEALTH LIBRARY (MALAYSIA)

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This paper was presented at the Regional Workshop of National Focal Point Librarians on Global Health Library, held on the 23 – 25 May 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Global Health Library aims to promote the accessibility and availability of relevant health information and knowledge worldwide. The objectives of the workshop were to promote the aim of the Global Health Library especially in training activities, resource sharing, promoting WHO publications and expanding the network of 14 medical and health participating libraries in the Western Pacific Region namely, Australia, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Vietnam.

1. Introduction

1.1. Malaysia’s vision 2020 in 1991 envisages that Malaysia will achieve the status of a fully developed country. The vision lists nine societal goals to pursue. One of the goals emphasizes on achieving a scientific and progressive society. Malaysia’s commitment to Information Communication and Technology (ICT) intensified in the mid 1990’s whereas by several recommendations were made regarding ICT development. The National IT Agenda (NITA) was launched in 1996. One of the well known projects is the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). NITA provides a framework for the use of ICT to convert Malaysia into a knowledge-based society (K- Society).

1.2. Thus, the growing needs of information are constantly increasing with the significant growth of library and information resource center in Malaysia. Today, the medical and health libraries in Malaysia exist along with the growth of hospitals and government institutions all over the country.

2. Medical and Health Library Development

2.1 There are 85 hospitals and health related libraries located in government departments, academic and private institutions. To date, there are 70 libraries under the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) comprising of namely,
i) the department and institution libraries  
ii) state and district hospital libraries and  
iii) training/college libraries.

There are 14 academic medical libraries whereby eight (8) libraries are public institute of higher learning and the other six (6) libraries are private institutions. MOH has the largest number of libraries compared to other government ministries in Malaysia.

2.2. Within the organization of MOH, the institute for Medical Research (IMR) library, being the first special library to be established in Malaysia plays a vital role in the development of biomedical research collection. It functions as a depository center and controls the bibliographic identification number for all publications of the Ministry of Health Malaysia. It also acts as a coordinating library for Southeast Asian Medical Information Center (SEAMIC) activities in early 1990's as well as a national Focal Point for WHO Regional Biomedical Information.

3. The Union List of Medical Periodicals

The first union list of medical periodicals in libraries under the Ministry of Health was compiled and published in 1988. The second edition was published in 1997 with the aim of sharing the growing library resources, economizing on the purchase of journals and maximizing the utilization of resources among the libraries, thus improving library services. However, in this context, it is necessary to consider producing the new edition of union list in electronic format.

4. Malaysian Medical Librarians Group (Library Networking)

4.1. Malaysia has a Medical Librarians Group (MLG) which was formed in 1992. This group is one of the special library groups and a sub committee of the Librarians Association of Malaysia or commonly known as Persatuan Pustakawan Malaysia (PPM). The present chairperson is Ms Maimunah Abdul Kadir who is the head of the National University of Malaysia.

4.2. The MLG’s mission is to promote excellence and leadership of health information professionals through education, communication and resource sharing by utilizing the information systems and services and cooperation and networking among member librarians, in support of informed health care decision making.

4.3. Members of the group comprise of medical librarians from government departments, academic and private institutions. The MLG committee meets quarterly to plan, monitor and evaluate activities and programs being carried out. Various activities such as conducting courses/workshops for its members, organizing seminars and new product demonstrations for knowledge updates (in collaboration with publishers), arranging academic tours,
publishing MLG Bulletin and other social gathering such as hi-tea or fare-well party for librarians going into retirement are organized.

4.4. The group has its own website at URL–http://lib.hukm.ukm.my/mlg and they can be contacted via listserv at: mlgnet@yahoogroups.com. Malaysia’s Medical Librarians Group has plans to publish a union list of medical and health periodicals in Malaysia and hopes to implement the project at the beginning at 2005.

5. Directory of Medical and Health Libraries in Malaysia

The directory was first published and launched in April 2004. The MLG Committee took the initiative to compile the directory since 2003 and distributed it free to all medical libraries while minimal cost was charged to other libraries. The publication of the directory was sponsored by several book vendors.

6. Academic Tour

As the first study tour in 2002, the group visited medical libraries in Sydney, Australia. In September 2004, another library visit was organized by the MLG to Bangkok, Thailand. The academic tour was organized by iGroupnet/Access Dunia in conjunction with the Bangkok Online Information and Education Conference held at Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. The visit and conference enabled MLG members to exchange professional views with the Thai medical librarians and enhance knowledge in the field of library and information.

7. Training Courses for Competencies

7.1. Recently, the National Library of Medicine Workshop was held on 3rd – 4th May 2005 at the Computer Laboratory of the National Institute for Health Management (NIHM) in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. The workshop was jointly conducted by NIHM and the Librarians Association of Malaysia with the cooperation of Access Dunia Sdn. Bhd. About 30 participants from all over Malaysia attended the workshop. The course programs covered the searching of the National Library Medicine Gateway, Medical Subject Headings (MESH), problems encountered and practical exercises. An expert in Cataloging and Metadata Services from Caval Collaborative Solutions based in Melbourne, Australia was invited to conduct the workshop.

7.2. Another training course will be conducted in July 2005 by the Institute for Medical Research Library with the topic “Library Management in Digital the Era”. The course will be designed to cater for junior medical librarians in libraries under the Ministry of Health Malaysia.
8. MOH Telemedicine Service

8.1. The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) flagship application supports the telehealth services introduced by MOH in December 2000. Telehealth aims to maintain people in the “wellness” paradigm through the integration of information, medical and health, telecommunication and human-machine interface technologies.

The four applications in Telehealth are Lifetime Health Plan (LHP), Mass Customised/Personalised Health information and Education (MACPHIE), Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Teleconsultation.

8.2. Since 2001, healthcare professionals in Malaysia are able to access and retrieve relevant information available in Virtual Resources (CME) in Telehealth which acts as a gateway to e-journals, e-books, medical databases, electronic courses for distance learning and linkages to accredited medical and health websites. The Telehealth website can be accessed via the MOH website at URL – http://www.telehealth.com.

9. Knowledge Hub in Medical and Health

9.1. Telehealth-Virtual Library serves as one of the functions for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in MOH. It is in fact an alternative for MOH personnel for CME to access electronic resources. Since 2004, the libraries under MOH planned to implement K-hub, a repository center or knowledge bank for medical and health information with great emphasis on the development of local digital contents available in libraries under MOH. Therefore, MOH libraries need to be upgraded to be a “real virtual library” through ICT system integration.

9.2. In order to minimize the duplication of services, both parties, Telehealth-Virtual library team and MOH librarians had agreed to integrate K-hub into the Telehealth-Virtual Library. Thus, only one portal needs to be implemented as Telehealth-CPD Online Virtual Library/ K-hub or K-hub@moh.gov.my. A “single sign on” should enable a user to execute a federated search throughout this K-hub services.

10. Conclusion

In the process of progressing, there are some important issues which need to be addressed. One of the factors which affect staffing of libraries in MOH are the shortage of qualified personnel. There are no professional staff in many hospitals and training colleges libraries. Most libraries are headed by library assistants, thus, the level of development in MOH libraries varies. The problems in academic medical libraries are not as acute as in the Ministry of Health Malaysia libraries. The need for professional training and development of libraries is also a challenge to MOH libraries. Another common problem faced is financial constraints.

In the era of information technology and globalization, libraries should find new ways for cooperation and integration in the field of medical and health information through the implementation of programs, activities and resource sharing among libraries at the regional and global levels.