

Two heads are better than one: A case of the University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences Library

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to highlight sustainable ways of developing synergies and partnerships outside the University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences Library (CHSL) that will assist in developing solutions in health information provision in Zimbabwe. The paper is going to examine the importance of partnerships and synergies in the development of medical libraries particularly the CHS Library. The study is going to be a case study that will highlight the historical relationships between the CHS Library partners, the current collaboration, the partnership match, accomplishments, challenges and solutions. A brief review of the literature regarding elements of successful alliances and partnerships and a case study of the University of Zimbabwe CHS Library will be described. From the study, the paper will discuss lessons learnt and the future standpoint for the CHS Library partnerships. It is hoped that, the results from the study will help to build a critical mass of advocates who will lobby for funding and support for the development of medical libraries in Zimbabwe and other developing nations. With a diverse set of contributions from state, local, educational, and governmental libraries that actively pursue community involvement in a myriad of ways and through varying levels of interaction; the CHS Library will be guided accordingly by the results of the study and this will help in reviewing its commitment towards health information provision. The results from the study will help in the development of an incomparable health information system in the country that ultimately assists in improving healthcare outcomes.

Keywords: Partnerships, synergies, health libraries, Zimbabwe, University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences Library

Introduction

Zimbabwe Health profile

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country located in the Sub-Saharan region. Its economy is mainly driven by agriculture and mining. (ZIMSTAT, 2012) It has a total population of 12 973 808 (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2012). Health research, training and other health initiatives are funded by the Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. The Government has established various channels to address health problems in the country. For example, there is the National AIDS Council, National Cancer Registry,

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council and many others. The Government of Zimbabwe is a signatory to many regional and international treaties and declarations such as the Millennium Declaration and Abuja Declaration, Campaign for Accelerated Reduction in Maternal Health (CARMA), United Nations Convention on Social, Cultural and Economic Rights and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. These conventions provide guidelines and targets for health care provision.

According to the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (2010-2011) adult HIV prevalence rate is at 15%. According to the same survey; the under 5 mortality rate in Zimbabwe is at 84 deaths per 1000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 57 deaths per 1000 live births and neonatal mortality is 31 deaths per 1000 live births. Approximately two thirds of childhood deaths occur during infancies with more than one third taking place during the first month of life. Perinatal mortality for the country as a whole is 39 deaths per 1000 pregnancies. Maternal mortality stands at 960 deaths per 100 000 live births that is; for every 1000 births in Zimbabwe there are 10 maternal deaths. Life expectancy for males and females is at 53 and 55 respectively. (WHO, 2009)

In order to reverse the disturbing statistics mentioned above, there is need for integrated efforts by key players in the health sector. These include the government through the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, health teaching and learning centres, and health libraries and information centres. The government of Zimbabwe works with local and international organisations to improve the health sector in the country. These institutions play different roles and provide different services to enhance the health sector in Zimbabwe. Libraries and information centres play a pivotal role in providing information to health care professionals and consumers about the prevention, treatment, care and support of certain conditions. The emergence and re-emergence of diseases requires a rigorous approach in medical research, teaching and learning. Health Libraries provide a missing link in medical research and education through the provision of relevant and current information that support evidence based health interventions. This view is supported by Ravdin (1965) who says that, the U.S National Library of Medicine is a great Library, but teaching and training in medicine cannot prosper and its physicians cannot remain educated without access to medical libraries.

The problems that characterise the health sector in Zimbabwe and other third world countries ought not to be the sole responsibility of concerned governments; but should involve all stakeholders for positive health outcomes. Some health challenges have not responded to the top-down or single-solution programmes resulting in the need for partnerships that enable different institutions to support each other by leveraging, combining and capitalising on their complementary strengths and capabilities. Health professionals and institutions are expected to do more with less, and with the growing interest in health outcomes, many of them are held accountable for some challenges which they do not have control over. The Ministry of Health and Child welfare in Zimbabwe was allocated 9.87% of the 2013 nation budget which is 6.13% below the 15% recommended by the Abuja Declaration of 2001.

State of Partnerships at the University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences Library

The College of Health Sciences Library is a branch of the University of Zimbabwe Library which is publicly funded. The mission of the University of Zimbabwe Library is to provide access to scholarly information resources required to meet the learning, teaching, research and service needs of the University of Zimbabwe. To meet this mission, the UZ Library ought not to work on its own; it should engage relevant partnerships. The Library mainly

serves the University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences (CHS) which is an academic institution; to that note it takes academic excellence as a hallmark of its existence. The Library serves twenty-four (24) teaching departments and four research institutes namely; Anaesthetics, Anatomy, Chemical Pathology, Clinical Pharmacy, Community Medicine, Dentistry, Drugs and Toxicology Information Systems (DATIS), Haematology, Histopathology, Immunology, Medical Laboratory Science, Medical Microbiology, Medicine, Nursing Science, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Paediatrics, Pharmacy, Physiology, Psychiatry, Rehabilitation, Radiology and Surgery. The Institutes served are; Multimedia Resource Centre, Central African Journal of Medicine, Institute of Continued Health Education and Teaching Laboratories. The Library encourages the promotion and enhancement of clinical and biomedicine through providing diverse information services that support relevant research. As a result the Library assists in the teaching, learning and research activities at the CHS and beyond.

In 1984, the CHS Library was afforded a national mandate for the dissemination of health information in the country by the Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. This came as a result for the need of a national health information centre that assists in health research and decision making. The ultimate delivery of successful health services and high quality professionals is premised on the provision of accurate and relevant health information. In order to effectively serve the CHS community and Zimbabwe as a whole, there is need for the Library to have strategic partnerships with similar institutions for resource sharing and knowledge and skills exchange.

Fundamentally, the basis of CHS Library relationship with its environs and peripherals begins with the community it serves, which is the College of Health Sciences. The Library liaises with the faculty for collection development and information dissemination services. In this regard, CHS Library offers training to students and academic staff members on evidence based healthcare literature searching, health information literacy, online research, and information retrieval as well as reference management. Rader (2002) asserts that, librarians support the teaching, learning and research of health sciences by building collections, providing access to electronic information resources, offering proactive Library service and integrated information skills instruction. The nexus between the Library and its immediate stakeholder which is the CHS has to a greater extent transformed the Library's perceptions as a support element to an integral constituent in health education and healthcare delivery.

No one organisation or professional, working alone, has all the needed skills and resources hence the need for teamwork, partnerships and collaborations. Wildridge *et al* (2008) state that, we live in a global society therefore; it is no longer effective for organizations to work alone. Within the public, private and voluntary sectors, the need for partnership, often cross-sectoral working or working beyond the boundaries, is recognised as a vital component of success. In the UK, partnership working is a key component of the government's modernization agenda, particularly in the health field. During the past decade, the government of Zimbabwe was engulfed with a myriad of challenges which were caused by the economic meltdown. On appreciating its limitations in handling the task, the Government took a stance to adopt Public-Private sector Partnerships (PPP), under which the private sector would be called in to partner Government (ZEPARU, 2012). In all these initiatives, there is an element of partnership and collaboration which is embedded.

Developments in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resulted in changes in the way consumers seek information and how librarians disseminate information. The

absorption of Web 2.0 technologies presented a lot of endless opportunities which if fully embraced; health libraries and other players in the health sector to a greater extent could improve on health outcomes. The 2013 World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) theme of *Future Libraries: Infinite Possibilities* perfectly fits in the changes that are taking place which aptly reflect the endless possibilities in libraries. In order to effectively utilise these possibilities, libraries need not to work as separate entities, they should rather work as consortia, partners, coalitions or networks. It is timely; therefore, that the theme for 2013 IFLA WLIC Health and Biosciences Library section is *Libraries as Partners for Better Health Outcomes*. Partners in a collaboration play different roles for instance to estimate the need, demand, and uptake for existing and new products, since the public sector has the data and the private sector has the expertise.

What is a Partnership?

Waddock (1988) defines a partnership as a commitment by cooperations to work with organisations from different sectors. It involves a commitment of resources that is time and effort by individuals from all partner organisations. Ament (1987) identifies five criteria for a relationship to be characterized as collaboration

- i. Programs or projects are jointly designed and monitored.
- ii. Some autonomy is sacrificed by participants.
- iii. Resources are contributed.
- iv. Organizations are mutually benefited.
- v. Administrators are actively involved, or are supportive of the relationship, and maintain final decision-making powers.

Benefits of partnerships in health information provision

In order to improve access to health information for improved health outcomes, the CHS Library entered into a remarkable number of partnerships with public sector, the Government and civil society organizations. Wildridge et al (2008) argue that, partnership working is seen as providing benefits that are not achievable by other means. Shannon (1998) further states that by combining the individual perspectives, resources and skills of partners, the group creates a whole that is greater than the sum of individual parts. The sections coming after this are going to discuss some of the benefits that can be enjoyed by health and biosciences libraries if they work as partnerships. This discussion also derives from the benefits that have been realised by the CHS Library and its environs.

Collection development-Through partnerships with other organisations, health libraries receive support through subscription to journals, book purchase and book donations. Natarajan (2001) asserts that information, ideas and resources can be pooled through partnerships. Through the partnership that the CHS Library has with the World Health Organisation (WHO); the Library has access to thousands of journal articles; a considerable number of health databases and electronic books free of charge through the Health Inter-Network Access to Research Initiative (HINARI). Through the partnership the CHS Library has with the WHO, the Library is a depository of all the WHO publications in Zimbabwe. These publications are critical in medical education as they provide guidelines and latest information on different health issues. The CHS Library is a member of the Global Health Delivery Online. Through this membership, the Library has access to UpToDate which is an evidence-based, physician-authored clinical decision support information resource which clinicians trust to make the right point-of-care decisions. The CHS Library also receives

clinical guidelines and Essential Drugs List for Zimbabwe (EDLIZ) from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare to assist in medical research and education.

The University of Zimbabwe (UZ) Library is a member of the Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) a collaboration which aims at facilitating resource sharing amongst members through cooperative collection development, inter-Library loan services, electronic services provision and related activities. Each year, member libraries of ZULC submit the required electronic resources for that particular year and jointly subscribe to them through the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) initiative. This allows institutions to benefit the economies of scale which could not be achieved through individual Library subscriptions. Every year, the CHS Library receives book donations mainly from Book Aid International and Rotary Club. These books come as a result of the partnership that the Library has with the Faculty and the book donors.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) – Through internal and external collaborations, health libraries receive and share ICT resources for improved health information provision. The exponential growth rate in ICTs requires collaborative initiatives in developing sustainable solution in order to keep abreast with the ever-changing technological landscape. The CHS Library received ICT resources from World Health Organisation (WHO), Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) and from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary education through the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI) initiatives to improve access to current health information for the enhancement of quality medical education. To date, a total of fifty computers were received through these partnerships. Through the MEPI programme, the Library has access to fast wireless Internet connection.

Professional development and capacity building Natarajan (2001) states that, collaborative relationships expand the capacity of the participants to accomplish objectives that cannot be accomplished alone. New skills and knowledge is gained through professional development strategies. In 2012, health librarians from selected African countries had an opportunity to attend the training of the trainers on Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) which was organised by the Collaboration for Evidence Based Healthcare in Africa (CEBHA). This training workshop came into being as a result of the collaborative vision that CEBHA have on health librarianship in Africa. The CHS Librarian was awarded a bursary by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in 2012 to attend a professional development programme in the UK. Through this training programme, new skills and knowledge were obtained on Library management in the 21st century. In 2012, the University of Zimbabwe Senior Librarians received training on the pedagogy of information literacy (IL) from the British Library and Documentation Service (BLDS). The training aimed at equipping IL trainers with the relevant skills required to deliver quality IL programmes. The CHS Library is an affiliate to regional and international associations. The Library actively participates in these associations such as Network of African Medical Librarians (NAML) and Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa (AHILA). Through this nexus, the Library worked with other African Librarians in 2011 to develop a manual that is being used by most Libraries to educate students and healthcare professionals on health information literacy. Through the same association, the CHS Library worked with Makerere University, Albert and Cook Medical Library in coming up with a chapter on Evidence Based Healthcare to be included in the training manual. The exercise placed the CHS Library on the map which gives it an opportunity to attract interested parties for the development of sustainable health information provision strategies.

Marketing of products and services-Through participation in partnerships, health libraries have a chance of marketing their products and services. Promotional initiatives that are web hosted by other institutions help in attracting new partners and it could result in co-evolution of strong collaborations. For example, the CHS Library is a member of the NAML and AHILA, the Library features on these sites and other institutions may get to know about the Library through these networks. Sustainable partnerships do not necessarily involve the exchange of ideas; the mere sharing of successes and experiences helps in placing the Library on the global map. Each year, the University of Zimbabwe Library exhibits at the Research and Intellectual Expo which is a national event organised by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education for all the academic institutions in Zimbabwe. This event provides an opportunity for the marketing and promotion of Library products and services.

Financial support-Most libraries are faced with dwindling budgets caused by global economic recession. Financial resources are needed to acquire books, subscribe to journals and keep up with rapid changes in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) landscape. Financial benefits from a partnership maybe realized directly or indirectly depending on the kind of interventions that would have been effected. Grants go a long way in addressing budgetary issues as they fund projects that would have been impossible to undertake given the limited resources and limited budgetary allocations by mother institutions. Indirectly, collaborations and partnerships go a long way in addressing budgetary issues through donations in kind or in cash. For instance, book donations, ICT related donations, journal subscriptions help reduce budgetary deficits in some way resulting in enhanced resource allocation. The UZ Library receives small grants from INASP to support the marketing and promotion of eResources at the University of Zimbabwe.

Challenges faced by partnerships

There are some inhibiting factors to the progress and success of Library partnerships. Some of the impediments to Library partnerships are lack of appreciation and understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities, lack of communication, unshared vision and goals and political will. The fact that institutions in a partnership have to meet dual mandates; that of the parent institution and that of the coalition makes it difficult to balance. More attention will be given to the institution which leaves the partnership with limited time and resources. Normally coalitions or networks are formed as secondary entities which at times do not mandate institutions to actively participate all the time. This is detrimental to the flow of activities and the achievement of set goals and activities. Limited financial resources is another challenge that is faced by partnerships. Most partnerships survive through membership subscription fees and donations which are not certain and sustainable.

Strategies for maintaining and developing sustainable and successful partnerships

For partnerships to succeed there is need to strike a balance on benefits to all the parties involved. Beder (1984) agrees to this view by saying, there must be a balance in receiving and giving resources, and in giving up domain and power. Each participant must perceive that there is a match between needs and offerings. The CHS Library as the national focal point for the dissemination of information actively participate in outreach activities such as offering training to health professionals on how to conduct successful online information retrieval sessions. Widridge *et al* (2004) state that, to ensure progress is maintained as they develop, partnerships must find effective means of making decisions and of ensuring accountability. In

order to develop successful partnerships in health libraries, there is need to include some of the necessary catalysts that include time, trust, commitment, ownership of the partnerships.

According to Natarajan (2001) successful partnerships are built on the bedrock of system openness and transparency. External relationships should be actively sought with clear goals and objectives to all the parties involved. Secrecy in partnerships is detrimental to the success of a partnership and in meeting set goals and objectives. From the onset of a partnership, all parties should have a clear picture of the possible benefits, threats and opportunities of the partnership. This helps partners to move in the same strategic direction and be proactive to possible threats in external environment.

For every partnership to be successful, it is imperative to have a structure in place. This is crucial in clearly defining roles and responsibilities of partnership members to avoid overlapping of roles. Flexible structures help parties adapt to each other, and create an ambience of candidness and receptiveness. The structures set should be inclusive of all the stakeholders involved in order to have a clear representation of everyone involved.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at assessing the current partnerships that the CHS Library has and the benefits that can be enjoyed if health libraries work as coalitions. The paper looked at some of the ways that should be incorporated in order to come up with sustainable partnerships. Given the challenges that are faced by health Libraries in many countries, partnerships provide workable solutions through Library collection development, professional development and capacity building, provision of ICT resources, financial support and marketing and promotion of Library products and services. In the formation or running of any Library partnership, there are some challenges which are faced and these include lack of appreciation and understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities, lack of communication, unshared vision and goals. Other challenges include limited time and financial resources. In order to develop sustainable and successful Library partnerships, there is need to have shared goals and vision, transparency, commitment, structure and all parties involved should equally participate and benefit from the partnership.

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