Contributed Paper Session II-3

A STUDY OF THE ANIMAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL’S USE OF INFORMATION BROKER SERVICES

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ABSTRACT: The results of surveys of US and Canadian veterinary medical libraries and information brokers used by animal health professions provide data on usage and services offered. The services most frequently used by animal health professionals were photocopying and computer searching. Tables illustrate data obtained in the usage of these services. Insufficient data received from information brokers voided that part of the study. Unique services provided by CONSULTANT, Swine Information Library Service, First Move are described. Library service activities used by animal health professionals at the NAL, NLM, AVMA, and the PR Committee of the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association are described.

Introduction:

This study evolved from two thoughts I have had for a long time. In servicing requests from unaffiliated library users, I have wondered how much usage is made of services of information specialists, especially of information brokers. Reference librarians who work in public, tax-supported institutions reasonably expect to promote their services, or would like to know if other information brokers are being used as a referral resource. Secondly, was a desire to learn of the more successful types of techniques used to attract or increase the usage of one’s library services.

Methodology:

For those unfamiliar with the term “information broker”, the ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science (1) defines information broker as “An individual or organization which, on demand and for a fee, provides information directly to individual and organizational consumers, using all sources available.” Since a few of the U.S. veterinary medical libraries offer photocopying services on a gratis basis, for our study, we changed this definition to accommodate those libraries that did not charge a fee. Before beginning this survey, an online search of the Library and Information Science Abstracts was performed using the DIALOG system (the online counterpart of this abstract is called LISA and corresponds to the British Library Association’s printed index of the same name). This database contains articles back to 1969. The online search did not retrieve any relevant articles to similar types of studies.

Information brokers were arbitrarily classified into three major groups. The first two groups were veterinary medical libraries located in the U.S. and Canada, and information brokers established as profit-making businesses. There are 27 veterinary medical libraries in the U.S. and four in Canada for a total of 31 veterinary medical libraries. The listing of these libraries with their addresses and other useful information was located in the section titled “Directory of Information Sources” of the AVMA Directory. (2)

The third group was a miscellaneous grouping consisting of two national library resources: the library of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), and the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association.

The animal health professional population covered by this study did not include faculty and staff that use veterinary medical libraries. For this study, we restricted our surveys to study only animal health professionals unaffiliated with the institution’s library; i.e., private practitioners (in solo or group practice) or veterinarians employed by corporate
businesses, such as producers or suppliers of animal health products.

For the veterinary medical libraries group, a combination closed- and open-ended 4-page questionnaire was developed (Appendix A). The questionnaire asked what services the librarians offered and how much usage was made of those services. We tested two hypotheses. One hypothesis was built upon the thinking that generally the administration supports provision of this type of service while faculty and staff are opposed to the provision of this service. The second hypothesis tested the premise that, even if the service is provided to unaffiliated library users or to "off campus library users", the library may be restricted in promoting its services. Therefore, another section of the questionnaire had three choices that applied to the services rendered to off-campus requesters. The respondents were asked if the library's services were provided upon request, but were not promoted because of (a) insufficient staff, (b) too heavy an internal work load, or (c) lack of funds. The second choice asked if the library did not provide such services. Finally, we asked if the services were provided and promoted.

The third part of the survey identified what specific services were provided and how much they were used. The services examined were: (1) photocopy activity; (2) computer searching which included both CD-ROM and online searching; (3) availability of an acquisitions list; and (4) availability of a SDI or a Current Awareness Service. Provision was made for describing any nontraditional services provided. The results from this survey were summarized and included descriptions of two unique services.

A 4-page open-ended questionnaire was developed for the second group, the information brokers. The major reference resource used to identify information brokers was the 1991 edition of The Burwell Directory of Information Brokers, edited by Helen Burwell and Carolyn Hill. (3) (This directory was formerly titled Directory of Fee-Based Information Brokers.) The directory is arranged with a subject index that included disciplines in which the brokers have subject expertise. After scanning such relevant subject headings as agriculture and veterinary medicine, only 24 information brokers were identified.

The last major group (Miscellaneous) consisted of two major national information resources that animal health professionals could utilize as starting points for information needs. These organizations did not all offer photocopying or document retrieval and the computer searching services like those offered by the libraries and information brokers represented in the first two groups. However, each was considered a major information resource. Representatives of these organizations were contacted by telephone and asked to summarize, in a brief report, how animal health professionals used their services. Responses were received by FAX. The representatives contacted were: Jean Larson, Head of the Animal Welfare Center of the National Agricultural Library (NAL); Sheldon Kotzin, Chief of the Bibliographic Services Division of the National Library of Medicine (NLM); Liane Lenski, Librarian at the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA); and Guy Coffee, who is the Public Relations Committee Chairman of the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association.

Results:

Of the 31 U.S. and Canadian veterinary medical libraries, 28 returned their questionnaires. Not all, however, answered every question in the survey. The first page of the questionnaire contained two questions. One question tested the hypothesis that, generally, administration supports provision of an off-campus reference service (OCRS) whereas faculty and staff oppose such a service. Since one-third of the veterinary medical libraries responded that both faculty and administration supported this service, this hypothesis could not be substantiated. Likewise, the second question pertaining to the development and approval of a policy statement governing the provision of an OCRS was voided because only five veterinary medical libraries had such a statement.

Fifteen (53%) veterinary medical libraries responded to the series of questions testing the hypothesis that they provided an OCRS, but did not promote it. Eight veterinary medical libraries responded that they did not provide an OCRS, and only six veterinary medical libraries responded that they both provided and promoted an OCRS. Twenty veterinary medical libraries provided partial or complete responses to the questions concerning photocopying services. Ranges for each ranking were arbitrarily assigned and are presented in Tables 1-3.

To questions on the databases searched by CD-ROM and online searching, most respondents did not provide data on the exact number of searches performed. This service could only be evaluated by identifying which databases were searched. Respondents ranked the databases they searched from the most heavily used to the least used. Eleven
veterinary medical libraries searched on CD-ROM terminals while 16 veterinary medical libraries searched online. The data are summarized in Table 4.

The last two sections asked about distribution of an acquisitions list and the availability of an SDI or current awareness service. Eighteen veterinary medical libraries responded, with two distributing an acquisitions list while six had an SDI service available. No one provided information on the provision of any non-traditional or innovative references. There were two that provided unique services worth highlighting. One has been in existence for several years and is now starting to gain international recognition for the high quality of its services. The other has just been established and should be watched to see how it progresses in the coming months.

The first one is called CONSULTANT. It was established by Drs. Maurice White and John Lewkowica in December 1984 at the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. CONSULTANT is a computer-assisted diagnosis and information service. The information component was developed by Susanne Whitaker, Director of Cornell's Flower Veterinary Library, and Dr. White. The diagnosis component contains information on and literature citations for over 7,000 diseases of birds, cats, cattle, dogs, goats, horses, pigs and sheep. For each disease, there is a brief description, a list of citations, and the clinical signs that might be seen. The clinician or student can ask for a list of the diseases that might cause a clinical sign (or signs) in an animal, then look up information on each disease, or can ask for information on the disease directly. The database is updated weekly. The information service component is linked by electronic mail to the Flower Veterinary Library. The library provides a reference service which takes advantage of both this electronic link and the regular review of clinical literature which keeps the citations in CONSULTANT current. If the user wants a hard copy of any of the almost 7,000 citations in CONSULTANT or a citation from another source, the user sends an electronic mail request to the library, and the citation will be copied and mailed. Literature searches are also available. A fee covers the costs of these services. The database is licensed for use at veterinary schools in six countries, and about 400 veterinarians in six states and Canada are using the service.

The other unique service worthy of note has just been established at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, and is called the Swine Information Library Service. A 2-year fellowship was established under the leadership of Mitsuko Will-
to purchase this software package. Sheldon Kotzin, Chief of the Bibliographic Services Division at NLM, reported there were 57 practicing veterinarians with GRATEFUL MED passwords. (5) They are in 20 states, with California having the highest number of users. Five states have only one veterinarian each, and the remaining 14 states have an average of three veterinarians per state searching GRATEFUL MED. There are 112 veterinarians associated with schools of veterinary medicine using GRATEFUL MED. (GRATEFUL MED is a registered trademark of the National Library of Medicine). As of March 1992, NLM has issued about 52,000 individual and institutional passwords in the U.S.

Liane Lenski, Librarian at the AVMA headquarters in Schaumburg, IL, received requests from 83 members, 27 foreign veterinarians, and 13 veterinary related organizations. (6) These requests were for reprints from the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association or American Journal of Veterinary Research, or for information on various topics from animal diseases to veterinary pharmaceuticals and products.

The Public Relations Committee of the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association does not provide reference services, but it promotes the services of its members' libraries to private veterinary practitioners. It has undertaken three projects of interest. The first was started in 1983, and is an exhibit at the annual meeting of the AVMA. Some of the past exhibits were co-sponsored with NAL. Handouts and materials promoted the libraries' services. The exhibit often contained a computer terminal for demonstrating online searching. Exhibits have not been possible at all of the AVMA annual meetings because of location and expense. This volunteer effort usually has little or no subsidizing funds.

The second project is a section in the AVMA Directory titled “Directory of Information Sources”. This is a listing of all veterinary medical libraries in the U.S. and Canada plus the two national libraries, each with its address, contact person, telephone and FAX numbers, BITNET network ID, and library hours. A table indicates which of the six different services each library provides. The last section of this directory describes the basic veterinary literature resources available, and summarizes the computer databases and services available. This section has been included in the AVMA Directory since 1984.

The last project is an article in the April 1992 issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association promoting the use of veterinary medical libraries. (7) It coincided with National Library Week, April 5-11, 1992. Many members expressed satisfaction with the draft article. It will be interesting to evaluate its impact. This is an ideal occasion to annually promote library services.

Conclusions:

Animal health professionals primarily use the photocopying and computer searching services of veterinary medical libraries. Fifty-three percent of veterinary medical libraries provide services to unaffiliated users, but do not promote their services. Few veterinary medical libraries make available either acquisitions lists or an SDI (current awareness) Service. Results of this survey suggest a need to study the information requirements of animal health professionals, and to determine if these needs are being adequately met.

Acknowledgement

I wish to very gratefully acknowledge the editorial assistance of Dr. Frederick W. Oehme. Without his help the Proceeding's editors would have had a much bigger challenge.

References:


### Tables

**Table 1. The number of veterinary medical libraries receiving requests by origin of request**

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**Table 2. The number of veterinary medical libraries receiving requests by type of requester**

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**Table 3. The number of veterinary medical libraries receiving requests by type of employment of requestor**

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**Table 4. Ranking of databases searched**

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Appendix

Supplementary Questionnaire on Off Campus Reference Service

Part I Administration and Policies

If your library has a policy or a section in your Procedures Manual pertaining to Off Campus Reference Service (OCRS), a copy of it would be appreciated. Generally, it appears that perhaps administration supports provision of this type of service for either a public relations or political reasons while the faculty and staff are generally opposed for their benefit. With these thoughts in mind, please mark the box below to each question that best fits your library's situation in regards to support for providing OCRS and the presence of a policy statement or section.

1. Parties endorsing or supporting the provision of OCRS.
   [ ] OCRS is supported and/or endorsed by both administration and faculty.
   [ ] OCRS is supported and/or endorsed only by administration.

2. Policy statement
   a. Mark all boxes below that apply to who all had a hand in developing your Policy Statement.
      [ ] Librarian
      [ ] Administration
      [ ] Library Committee
   b. Mark all boxes below that apply to who all had a hand in approving your Policy Statement.
      [ ] Librarian
      [ ] Administration
      [ ] Library Committee

Irrespective of support of an OCRS and presence of a written policy, another hypothesis worth searching into is, it is from inadequate personnel and/or budget of many veterinary medical libraries that precludes their ability to offering such a service or to be willing to aggressively promote such a service. To check this hypothesis out, at the top of the next page please mark the appropriate box(s) that apply to your library under only one of the first two options or the third option.
☐ OCRS is provided but not promoted because of:
  ☐ Insufficient staff.
  ☐ Too heavy of an internal work load.
  ☐ Lack of funds.

☐ OCRS is neither provided nor promoted because of:
  ☐ Insufficient staff.
  ☐ Too heavy of an internal work load.
  ☐ Lack of funds.

☐ OCRS is provided and promoted.

Part II  Quantitative Measurement of Services Provided.

General - disregarding such standard services as photocopying, computer searches, mailing of acquisitions lists, SDI. and responding to reference questions, please specify any other types of services that you provide through your OCRS:__________________________

Measurement of Standard Services Provided - in this section an attempt will be made to establish either by estimate or with exact numbers the amount of service that is being provided. You'll note that in each subsection you have three options for providing an answer to that particular service. These options are: (1) by marking NA (Not applicable); (2) marking one of the three ranking to a response that will give an estimate; and (3) the option of providing an exact response.

Photocopying

Note that this subsection has data obtained from photocopy requests broken down into three subcategories. The data you provide can reflect data accumulated or estimated covering either for a calendar or fiscal year. For those responding by providing exact numbers to their total count, there should be the same total in each subcategory.
By origin of request

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<th>Some (15-29)</th>
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*NA = not available

By Type of Requester

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*NA = not available

By Employment of Requester

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*NA = not available

Computer Searching

1. Databases searched - please specify with No. 1 ranked as the most heavily searched and the last number as the least searched.
   a. CD-ROM Databases
      (1). __________________________
      (2). __________________________
      (3). __________________________
      (4). __________________________
   b. Online Databases
      (1). __________________________
      (2). __________________________
      (3). __________________________
      (4). __________________________
2. Total Number of searches performed - please write the letter E after the number, if the number is an estimate.
   a. CD-ROM Databases     b. Online Databases

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<th>Rank</th>
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</table>

Acquisitions List

Availability - check the box below that applies to your library.
☐ Yes, we distribute an Acquisitions List through our OCRS.
☐ No, we don't distribute an Acquisitions List through our OCRS.

If you answered yes, please specify the number of copies distributed for each issue. ______.

SDI or Current Awareness Service

Availability - check the box below that applies to your library.
☐ Yes, we provide this type of service through our OCRS.
☐ No, we don't provide this type of service through our OCRS.

Bibliographic Sources - check the box below that applies to your library.
☐ This type of service is derived totally from an in-house developed system.
☐ This type of service is derived from a combination of an in-house developed system and the use of bibliographic sources.
☐ This type of service is derived solely from the use of bibliographic sources.