

Information-seeking by naturopathic doctors: A review of the literature

Anne G. Turner, MLIS, Bastyr University Library, Kenmore, Washington

anne.turner@comcast.net

Objective

Why is it important to develop an understanding of naturopathic doctors' information-seeking?

- In the US, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is used by a significant portion of the population.
- Naturopathic doctors are part of a larger medical landscape that is changing in response to many factors, both professional and consumer-driven.
- Developing an understanding of naturopathic doctors' information needs and behaviors, preferred information sources, and barriers to information will help lay the foundation for the design and development of information resources for this group of professional users.

Research Questions

1. What is known about the information-seeking of naturopathic doctors?
2. What is known about naturopathic doctors--their profession, and their practices--that might add insight to future information studies?

Databases searched during Spring 2006:

Discipline	Database
Information & Library Sciences	Library Literature and Information Science
	Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA)
Education	ERIC
Health Sciences	MEDLINE (PubMed)
	Web of Science
	ProQuest Medical Library
CAM-Specific	Allied and Complementary Medicine (AMED)
	Alt HealthWatch

Methods

- Searched multiple databases during Spring 2006.
- Databases covered library and information science, education, biomedicine, and CAM.
- Search strategy utilized controlled vocabularies and/or subject headings, and keyword strategies.
- Identified systematic reviews, and quantitative and qualitative studies.

Results

Lack of data on naturopathic doctors' information-seeking:

Only one study was identified that gathered data from naturopathic doctors about information resources and barriers to information.(1)

- Survey of 105 Australian naturopathic doctors.
- Probed provision of information to CAM patients by providers prescribing oral medications.
- Found that naturopathic doctors' information sources included professional newsletters (91%), reference textbooks (72%), and CE seminars provided by manufacturers (70%).



Related trends, research, and themes in literature:

- Information studies of users other than naturopathic doctors reveal the need for CAM resources. (2)
- CAM information retrieval and research: challenges due to inconsistent indexing, inadequate controlled vocabularies, and bias. (3) (4)
- Professional status and educational standards for naturopathic doctors are evolving. (5)
- CAM integration into biomedical practice and education is growing. (6)

Results (continued)

Information studies of primary care practitioners (PCPs) may provide models for study design:

- Coumou and Meijman reviewed 21 research studies of PCPs' information-seeking. (7)
 - Concluded that PCPs' main information sources were colleagues, followed by books and journals.
 - This remained consistent between 1992-2005, despite the rise of the Internet and increasing availability of electronic resources.
 - Reported barriers to information-seeking using electronic resources included perceptions about the amount of time required, difficulty creating optimal search queries, and the challenge of evaluating retrievals.

Conclusion

Definitive research is needed:

- Naturopathic doctors' information needs have not been studied in a systematic fashion.
- Studies reveal that biomedical practitioners need and want access to high-quality CAM resources.
- The increasing integration of CAM topics into biomedical education and research reinforces the need for access to CAM resources.

Possible questions for future research:

- Do naturopathic doctors require different CAM resources than biomedical practitioners?
- Does the practice environment of naturopathic doctors affect information needs?

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