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REACHOUT THROUGH OUTREACH

Using On-site Office Hours to Connect with Health Care Professionals

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Four librarians at the A. Alfred Taubman Health Sciences Library recently began offering on-site office hours to four distinct units within the University of Michigan Health System and academic health sciences environment: the School of Dentistry, School of Public Health, Cardiovascular Center, and a research laboratory in the Comprehensive Cancer Center. The goal of each office hour experience was to better reach and more proactively support the information needs of underserved clients, while also providing the librarians with more visibility in the units. Despite relatively low walk-in rates, the librarians found that the exposure gained by offering the office hours made each experience an invariable success.

KEYWORDS collection development, consultations, health sciences libraries, instruction, office hours, outreach, service models

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, several liaison librarians at the University of Michigan's (UM) A. Alfred Taubman Health Sciences Library (THL) started offering on-site office hours (OH) in an effort to more proactively support and address the information needs of the faculty, staff, and students of select units scattered

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throughout the UM health sciences environment. The THL is a single library that serves and supports a large community of health care professionals, educators, students, and researchers from a wide range of health-related disciplines—a list that includes more than one hospital, upwards of 20 clinical departments, several large research centers, and a school or college for dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and public health. To support such a large and diverse clientele, the THL has in place a strong and active liaison model, where individual and small teams of librarians target and support specific disciplines and units. As part of their liaison work, the authors implemented regularly scheduled office hours outside the physical THL space and inside the workspace and workflow of four of their liaison units.

The four THL office hour experiences that form the basis of this paper occurred in the UM School of Dentistry (SoD), School of Public Health (SPH), Cardiovascular Center (CVC), and a research laboratory at the Comprehensive Cancer Center (CCC). Although each librarian shared the common goal of better supporting a liaison unit with their office hours, their experiences differed in many ways and act as effective case studies for those considering implementing similar programs in their own hospital setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although many papers discuss librarian adoptions and implementations of office hour models—often referred to as outreach and reference services in the literature—very few describe experiences directly related to a health sciences context. Two early comparable service models described in the literature are general practice libraries, which are mini-libraries associated with individual clinical practices, and clinical librarianship, which involves individual librarians intensely integrated into the activities of a clinical department. Both developed several decades ago and grew out of a need to provide clinicians with convenient and immediate access to information (1–3). More recently, given the growth in the production and consumption of medical literature, coupled with the growing emphasis on evidence-based practice, this need to provide information services “within the environment where primary health care professionals operate” is even more pronounced (4).

As Orchanian-Cheff demonstrated, providing on-site information services through office hours can dramatically increase the amount of contact a librarian has with a department. After a 7-month office hour experiment, the author noted an increase of 104% in the number of literature search requests she received post-OH in comparison with the number she received over the same period of time pre-OH (5). Furthermore, quantifying office hour success can, as others have argued, go beyond search request numbers.

Wagner and Tysick mentioned that their office hours generated significant amount of goodwill amongst their clients, concluding that the “visibility and interactions resulting from being in the department far exceed[ed] any benefit from sitting in the libraries’ regular offices” (6). They further attributed their ability to become involved in and attend committee meetings, faculty meetings, and networking events to their on-site office hour service. In another study, after fearing that their user communities were “losing touch” with the library, Freiburger and Kramer, two librarians at the Arizona Health Sciences Library, began a successful office hour program that led to not only increases in annual literature search request numbers, but also invitations to participate in grants and instruction (7). Handler et al., writing about their office hour experience at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Health Sciences Library, listed a number of secondary benefits associated with office hours, including increases in contacts and interactions, goodwill, and in the ability to build and cultivate long-term relationships with clients (8).

The literature is also well populated with strategies for implementing such services. Identifying an appropriate name is important, particularly if the service is to align with an already existing office hour, reference, or outreach service. Marketing is acknowledged as an important component of a successful implementation, and case studies list e-mails, faculty and department meetings, instruction sessions, LCD displays, and print handouts and signage as possible promotional methods (6–9). Although mentioned less frequently in the literature, obtaining buy-in from key personnel in the unit is essential, because it is the key personnel who are likely to provide the librarian with the equipment and space necessary to run the office hours and to help facilitate the librarian’s integration into the unit’s workflow.

THL OFFICE HOUR BACKGROUND

School of Dentistry (SoD)

In the SoD experience, the office hours developed soon after—and in response to—the closure of the dental library that had occupied a space in the dental building for several decades. A transition task force, which was composed of members from both the THL and SoD, agreed on the in-building office hour model in order to maintain a librarian presence in the school. During the transition, the dentistry liaison worked with SoD administration to identify usable space and equipment, namely a computer and desk, for the office hours, eventually leading to the hours being held in a section of a computer lab. The liaison opted to hold his weekly hours during one 2-hour block of time on Mondays to avoid most of the large faculty and department meetings that tend to occur in the school mid-week. The librarian promoted the office hours with messages via the school-wide SoD

e-mail list, which reaches every SoD faculty, staff, and student affiliate. He also used time in presentations for and consultations with members of the dental community to remind them of the office hours. To date, teaching faculty and lower- and upper-level dental students have comprised the majority of office hour visits, but the librarian has also connected with researchers and clinicians. Although meaningful connections are seldom made via walk-ins, the office hours have been used heavily for scheduled consultations, plus the weekly presence in the school has increased the liaison's visibility amongst faculty and staff.

Comprehensive Cancer Center (CCC) Research Laboratory

THL initiatives to provide services to a privately endowed campus research organization, the A. Alfred Taubman Medical Research Institute (TMRI), led to the establishment of office hours in the research laboratory of the director of the CCC, who is also a TMRI Scholar. During initial meetings regarding a service model, the THL liaison to the TMRI determined that establishing a THL presence in each Scholar's lab would be more productive than conducting instructional sessions for the entire TMRI. The librarian worked with the lab's manager to coordinate a 2-hour weekly block of time, and the lab manager designated a computer workstation for the librarian's use. Although researchers occasionally utilized office hours to ask questions about obtaining full-text of articles or data storage options on campus, there was never a heavy use of the office hours. However, office hours did significantly increase the visibility of the librarian, who now receives several e-mails per week from various lab members requesting assistance with literature searches or other issues. Additionally, the librarian's presence in the lab led to an excellent working relationship with the lab manager, who has involved her in several new projects. The OH model for the lab has been suspended pending the lab's relocation to a new campus facility, and will be reimplemented once the move is complete.

Cardiovascular Center (CVC)

Liaison office hours at the CVC were sparked by the quantity of research and clinical information needs being brought to the Mardigan Wellness Center, the patient education resource center located within the new CVC building and overseen by a health system librarian. Most clinical and research faculty were aware that patients could ask in-depth questions and get assistance with accessing health information at that location, and soon began bringing their professional information needs to the patient education librarian and her staff. As these queries were outside of the scope of patient information, the Wellness Center Librarian provided contact information for the liaison to Cardiovascular Medicine. Clinical and research staff indicated that they liked

the “drop-in” nature of the Wellness Center, and would like office hours staffed by the liaison to Cardiovascular Medicine at their location. The CVC Research Administrator facilitated the process of finding a suitable location, a conference room in the administrative suite of offices. Through marketing of the CVC office hours, the liaison librarian has assisted with multiple systematic review searches, provided short training sessions on new PubMed features, and worked with nursing and dietetics staff to answer clinical questions and better organize information for publication. Although this location has been ideal for fostering contacts with the CVC administration and communication officers, it remains fairly out of the way for most clinical faculty and staff. In order to better meet the information needs of residents, fellows, and clinical and research staff, the liaison is currently in the process of identifying a more convenient location and time for scheduled OH.

School of Public Health (SPH)

Office hours at SPH began shortly after the library located within the school was moved to another building with the other Health Sciences collections. With the goal of building relationships, providing on-site reference services, and creating a continued library presence, drop-in office hours were held midweek in a centrally located, highly visible conference room within SPH. These hours were advertised via word of mouth, in research consultations or class sessions, through e-mail lists for SPH students, faculty, and staff, and also posted on the Library’s Web site and on the SPH student activities forum. Initial attendance was moderate, with three or four people dropping in each week, but this diminished after the first month of service. Most visitors have been graduate students, with a few researchers, newly hired faculty members, and administrative assistants constituting the minority. Office hour traffic is consistently higher in weeks that the librarian sends an e-mail reminder to the school, and drop-in visits have also increased as the visibility of the office hour space was improved, by replacing table-top signage with a large banner outside the door.

OFFICE HOUR ACTIVITIES

Research Consultations

The research consultation, which is an intensive session designed to provide individuals and small teams with expert project support and guidance, is a common service offered by all THL liaison librarians. Consultations differ from traditional reference encounters in that the meetings are generally scheduled ahead of time and take place away from a reference desk, usually in an office or another library space set aside for such meetings. Although the provision of this type of consultation is frequent in the THL, its success in

large part demands a constituency that proactively seeks librarian expertise. In other words, the burden is on faculty, staff, and students to recognize that (a) they have an information need that needs to be addressed, and (b) that a librarian is the expert who can address that need. Of course, these two factors remain prevalent regardless of where the librarian is stationed, but the office hour model—by placing the librarian in the workflow of the unit—can facilitate connections with those constituents who seek assistance less proactively, potentially leading to, as Orchanian-Cheff's experience suggests, an increased usage of the consultation service (5).

During their office hours, the librarians encountered a diverse range of questions and requests, the bulk of which fall into the following categories:

- Expert searches for systematic reviews, theses, and other projects
- Citation analyses, including author publication and h-index searches
- Basic database instruction
- Support for grand rounds, journal clubs, and student assignments
- Strategies for keeping current
- Collection development
- Grant support

THL promotes and provides access to a large number of health sciences resources, so the office hour librarians were able to (re-)introduce office hour attendees to PubMed, Ovid MEDLINE, EMBASE, Scopus, Web of Science, CINAHL, Dynamed, UpToDate, Dentistry and Oral Sciences Source, government Web sites, National Center for Bioinformatics (NCBI) resources, including ENTREZ Gene and SNP, and an assortment of others.

Overall, consultations represent the most frequent type of interaction the librarians encountered during their office hours. In many cases, the consultations consisted of walk-ins, or constituents who approached the librarians during the scheduled office hour time without having previously made an appointment. In other cases, the librarians used the office hour time to schedule meetings with members of the unit, so that the consultation could occur in the office hour space, which was more conveniently accessible to the unit member than the THL. Across all four experiences, the librarians averaged over time less than one consultation per hour, but that number increased significantly after connecting the office hours to brief point-of-need instruction sessions.

Point-of-Need Instruction

Office hours have provided an excellent way to both identify and address the instruction needs of our schools and departments. By entering the

physical space and workflows of these departments and schools, offering open classes based on frequent office hour questions, and keeping sessions short and to the point, we have been able to more effectively provide instruction where and when it is needed.

In addition to individual consultations and meetings, librarians initially tried to respond to frequently occurring office hour questions by offering in-depth workshops within each unit's physical space. Noon hour classes drew the highest attendance yet tended to draw a large portion of participants from other campus areas, rather than specifically reaching SPH affiliates. To counteract this, the SPH librarian used her office hours as a venue to provide members of the SPH community with a series of short introductory instruction sessions called *Ten-Minute Tips at Two*, which she offered in the middle of each office hour session. These sessions were designed to fit into the short break between classes, encouraging participation from students and faculty already moving around the building, and provide the librarian with an opportunity to showcase the variety of services and support the THL offers. Topics have included advanced database search techniques, cited reference searching, locating tests and measurement tools, and citation management software. Prior to the instruction activity, the SPH office hours drew, like the other office hour experiences, less than one person per hour, but after repurposing the time, the SPH librarian has seen a range of 6 to 15 people per session, many of whom stay after the session to consult with the librarian.

Information Needs of Administrators

The information needs of administrators are often missed when librarians are planning how to provide information services to clinical departments and health sciences schools. We often focus strictly on instruction involving clinical or research resources, or providing traditional types of literature search services to our clientele. Although these activities are likely to forever remain at the core of what health sciences librarians do, office hours can also be used to connect and partner with administrators in new, interesting ways to provide value-added services and information that support their nonclinical activities.

The promotional messages sent to the CVC faculty and staff about the office hours included examples of the information needs that the liaison librarian could assist with, such as citation tracking, finding h-index numbers, and general citation management, in addition to traditional literature searches. Administrative staff (including some who had previously worked with the librarian on publication lists) immediately began using office hours to discuss partnering on information retrieval for annual reports and licensing visits. In addition to instructing staff on the definition and utility of the h-index and journal impact factor metrics for measuring research output and impact, the

librarian utilized contacts within the Medical School Office of Research to run curated publication reports for the CVC by calendar and fiscal year. After seeing the results of this partnership, the CFO then requested assistance with several literature searches related to the financial aspects of multidisciplinary health centers. Now that these valuable contacts have been made, most correspondence takes place outside of the formal office hour model.

Federal Grants: Funding, Applications, and Compliance

Faculty members and administrative support staff frequently use office hours to ask questions about federal funding and compliance requirements. These questions take many forms, including queries about federal submissions requirements, funding sources, and compliance with federal mandates. A prime example is the Public Access Policy implemented by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 2008. This mandate affects all authors whose published research is supported by NIH funding, and requires that the authors deposit the final version of the prepublication manuscript into PubMed Central, a federally maintained digital repository. Although the Policy is entering its third year and UM's University Library runs a well-publicized and heavily used third-party submission service, many faculty and administrative staff remain unaware of the mandate and its requirements or have questions pertaining to copyright, the submission process, and how to demonstrate compliance in grant applications or reports.

THL librarians often use office hours to address the information needs of faculty and administrative staff pertaining to the NIH Public Access Policy. Questions about the Policy and compliance tend to arise (a) in conjunction with reporting requirements, especially if an NIH program officer has recently asked the faculty for appropriate documentation to prove compliance; or (b) if a publisher submits on an author's behalf and the author receives notification to approve a manuscript. Common questions include

- Do I have to deposit book chapters or just journal articles?
- How do I get a PubMed Central ID (PMCID) for my recent publication?
- The publisher deposited my manuscript—do I have to do anything?
- I deposited a manuscript but I didn't list all of my NIH grants—can I add them now?

Librarians can generally answer the questions on site, and often make referrals to the University Library's deposit service, which can assist faculty with manuscript submission. In addition to fielding questions about the Policy during office hours, mini-presentations on the Policy and how to comply are always popular topics and lead to numerous referrals to the

University Library's deposit service, or to THL librarians who are experts on the Policy and the submission process. These presentations are often attended by administrative staff who assist faculty with compliance and documentation. Conversations about the Policy also allow librarians to broach other important issues pertaining to publication, including open access, copyright, and author's amendments to copyright transfer agreements.

Finally, faculty and administrative staff use office hours to request assistance with other matters pertaining to federal grants: format changes for the Biosketch and using myNCBI to populate publication history are two examples. Questions on these topics have led to requests for librarians to present at departmental faculty meetings or to the broader research community. For those patrons who need help with issues surrounding grants and compliance, office hours have been an important "in"—giving librarians a close look at previously unidentified needs of faculty and administrative staff, and providing us with a new venue to showcase our expertise.

Collection Development

Office hours have facilitated collection development and resource selection in two important ways. First, the exposure to library users, including faculty, students, and administrative staff in the settings where they do most of their work has provided liaison librarians with a unique perspective on the variety of information needs, and how information resources can effectively be integrated into workflows. During office hours in the CCC Research Laboratory, while meeting with the librarian on a different topic, the lab's manager mentioned an online resource that allows researchers to view research protocols and procedures via streaming video. He said that this would be a great resource for lab personnel, as it is often easier to learn a procedure by "watching a 3-minute video instead of having to read a 7-page protocol." He also indicated that this would be a valuable training resource for other research labs. Based on this suggestion, the liaison recommended this resource to the THL collections coordinator, who subsequently licensed it. The office hour model facilitates this sort of spontaneous interaction and removes an access barrier for a patron who might not be comfortable requesting a resource via e-mail or may not know that resource requests are even an option.

In addition to providing librarians with a new perspective on user information needs, office hours are a great platform for promotion of new or existing library resources. Mini-presentations at the office hours for the School of Nursing have focused on the THL e-book collection, which has recently expanded to include several new platforms and thousands of new titles. Due to processing time, many new titles are not accessible via the University Library catalog, and THL librarians are attempting to market the

content to ensure user awareness. Faculty and staff who attended the session were largely unaware of these resources before the presentation. They were very interested in learning the contents and functionalities of the various platforms, and several attendees expressed appreciation that THL was meeting their research and instructional needs by purchasing or licensing increasing amounts of online content.

CONCLUSION

The four office hour models implemented by THL librarians have been successful. Granted, none have resulted in high walk-in rates, but each office hour experience has had a positive impact on the liaison's ability to connect and partner with faculty, staff, and students, particularly when we consider the projects that have arisen *because* the office hours increased our visibility in these units. Given that the goal of each office hour was to increase and enhance the library's support of SoD, CCC, CVC, and SPH clients, the most important gauge of success is that connections are being made and partnerships are being formed. From this perspective, what actually occurs during the office hour is to some extent insignificant, as long as the office hour's existence is helping the library move its relationships forward. With this in mind, it might be worth viewing office hour implementations as temporary services aimed at increasing the library's support of and visibility in a particular unit. Once that goal is achieved, the librarian could consider offering the office hours less frequently in order to implement office hours in another underserved unit. Regardless, providing on-site office hours can provide, as is evident from the THL experiences and the activities listed above, librarians with opportunities to reach new clients and address information needs that they may not otherwise get a chance to address.

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