

# End-User Programs in Medical School Libraries: A Survey

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## ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was sent to all medical school libraries listed in the *Annual Statistics of Medical School Libraries in the United States and Canada (1983-1984)* asking librarians to describe their end-user programs. Of the 113 responding libraries, 78 had an end-user program. All provided some kind of formal instruction, 39 made equipment available to end users, and 22 provided and administered passwords. The reasons most cited for starting a program were staff interest and patron requests. The two most frequently taught systems were NLM/MEDLINE and BRS/Colleague. In general, respondents felt positive about the programs and planned to continue them. The most frequently mentioned problem was need for more equipment.

IN RECENT YEARS there has been an increase in end-user or do-it-yourself searching programs. System vendors have developed many products to tap the vast market that formerly relied on librarians as intermediaries [1]. Within the health sciences community, libraries continue to play an active role in providing end-user search support and training and have integrated those services into their programs [2, 3, 4]. The intent of our investigation was to determine the prevalence of end-user programs and to explore their effect on library service.

## NATURE OF THE STUDY

We investigated the prevalence of end-user programs in medical school libraries by surveying 121 U.S. libraries listed in *Annual Statistics of Medical School Libraries in the United States and Canada (1983-1984)* [5]. The questionnaire, sent in October 1985, asked that staff members who worked most closely with online searching do the actual reporting of data. In April 1986, a first follow-up was sent to nonrespondents. A medical school library which provided one or more of the following services was considered to have an end-user program.

1. Actively trains or informs library patrons to do their own online searching on national databases (excludes instruction on using bibliographic utilities such as OCLC or online public access catalogs).
2. Houses equipment for patrons to do their own searching (excludes lending hardware or software).
3. Provides administrative support to end users, e.g., provides passwords, and/or does billing.
4. Consults and advises end users in a systematic way (excludes informal assistance at reference desk or other service points).

## RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

One hundred thirteen libraries responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 93.3%. Seventy-eight respondents had an end-user program which met one or more of the above criteria.

As shown in Figure 1, all 78 libraries with end-user programs provided training or consultation. Fifty percent (39) of these libraries made equipment available in the library for use by end-users, while only 28% (22) provided passwords. Seven libraries which did not currently have a program were planning to develop one, so that there is deep penetration of such programs in the medical school library community. Many of the programs (35%), however, were still considered experimental.

Figure 2 indicates the types of training and/or consultation offered. Formal classes taught by library staff were provided by 68 libraries (87%). Formal classes using instructional staff from outside the library, presumably vendor representatives, were provided by 13 libraries (17%). Individual consultation was part of the end-user program in 60 libraries (77%). Literature or handouts developed specifically for the end user were provided by 62 libraries (79%).

When asked what prompted the libraries to begin an end-user program, staff interest was most

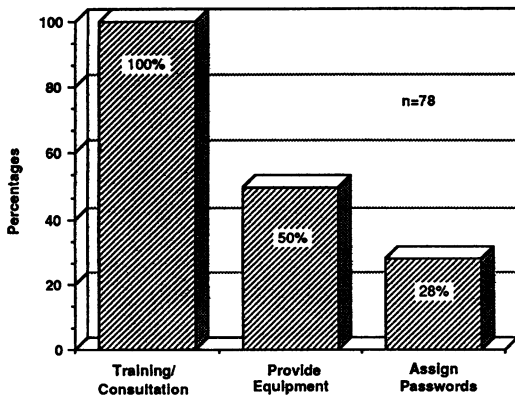


FIG. 1.—End-user program components.

frequently cited (86%), followed by patron request (79%), administrative mandate (14%) and the desire to reduce mediated searches (6%) (Figure 3). Several libraries mentioned that physicians had specifically requested such a program. Other libraries began programs after taking the National Library of Medicine-sponsored course on training librarians to train end users.

End users were taught several vendors' systems (Figure 4). As expected, NLM/MEDLINE was taught most frequently (68%), followed by BRS/Colleague (45%) and BRS/Search (14%). Other vendors include BRS/AfterDark (10%), Knowledge Index (6%), DIALOG (5%), and SDC (3%). Sixteen libraries indicated that they taught other systems, such as PaperChase, Minet, or CAS Online. Training fees were charged to the end users by thirty-nine of the libraries. Some libraries also charged patrons for their online time or equipment use.

An important aspect of this survey was to find the effects of end-user programs on library services. Several respondents indicated that the program

was so new that it was premature to speculate on its impact. When asked for perceived impact, the percentage of responses were as follows:

Interlibrary loans: no impact (67%); increase (17%); decrease (0%)

Mediated search requests: no impact (62%); increase (14%); decrease (10%)

Reference questions: no impact (59%); increase (26%); decrease (0%)

User education: no impact (17%); increase (72%); decrease (0%)

### Comments

On open-ended questions, there were several shared themes. The success of the program was sometimes judged by the number of passwords requested subsequent to training, and respondents often disagreed with using this criterion: "... it was not effective. Only two people have requested ... passwords." Post-training search activity is just one measurement of program effectiveness, and the literature reports varied frequencies of post-training searching [6].

The intangible results of the end-user programs were often judged to be the most rewarding. The increased respect that patrons developed for librarians, resulting in the librarians' heightened self-esteem, was most notable: "... the implementation of end-user searching has enhanced the respect that users have for the professional staff," and "end-user searching has enhanced our role in the academic environment." The "... faculty now call on us for microcomputer advice" and as a result, "library staff's self-esteem has improved. Clients' perspectives of staff is now more positive. We have a mutual admiration relationship happening." Many respondents were also pleased by the improved quality of mediated search requests. "Reference librarians have noted not only an increased number of search requests, but more importantly, increased quality in requests" and "... by training faculty and researchers they are better able to communicate with search intermediaries."

Among problems encountered, the most frequent was need for more equipment in the library, (18% of libraries). This was most strongly linked to the desire to give end users more hands-on experience and to expand services. The second most repeated comment was the need for more staff, as "end-user education and searching took more staff time than had been anticipated." Also cited was the need for better background information for librarians, both

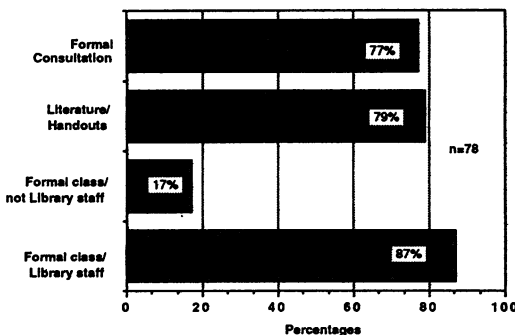


FIG. 2.—Types of training/consultation offered.

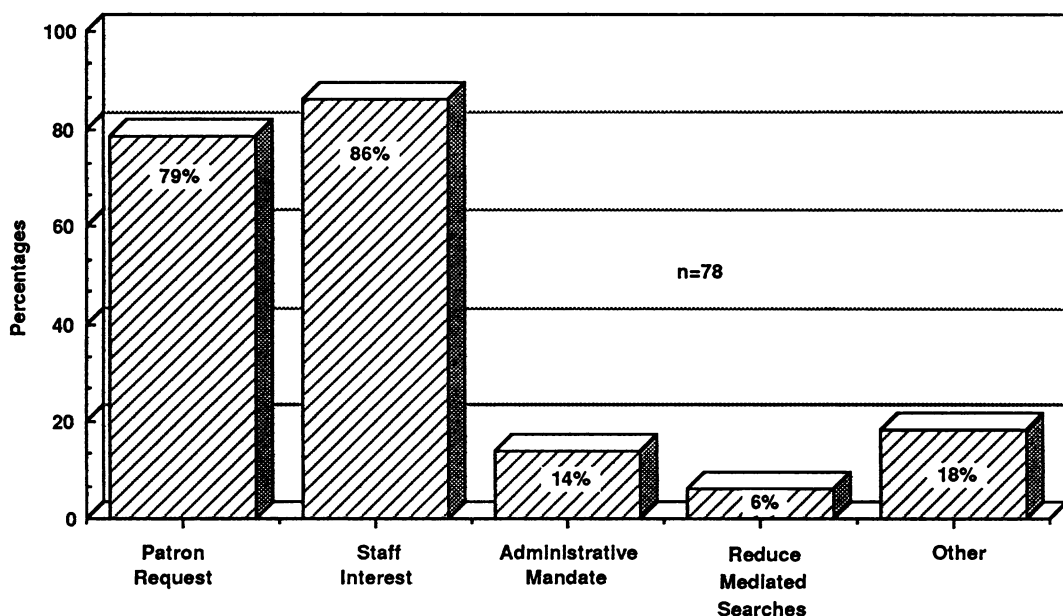


FIG. 3.—Factors prompting initiation of program.

in understanding the needs of patrons and in the librarians' need to understand teaching methods and material design. The desire to have patrons read manuals in preparation for class sessions so as to enable the librarian to devote more time to sharing searching expertise rather than instruction on use of the equipment was frequently mentioned. The librarian's experience was considered too valu-

able not to be used for interacting with the end-user. Another problem was uncertainty of the direction that the program should take: "... we are still struggling with the idea of what the library's role should be. We want to be central to the intellectual aspects of this activity, yet not book-keepers, bill collectors, and equipment trouble-shooters."

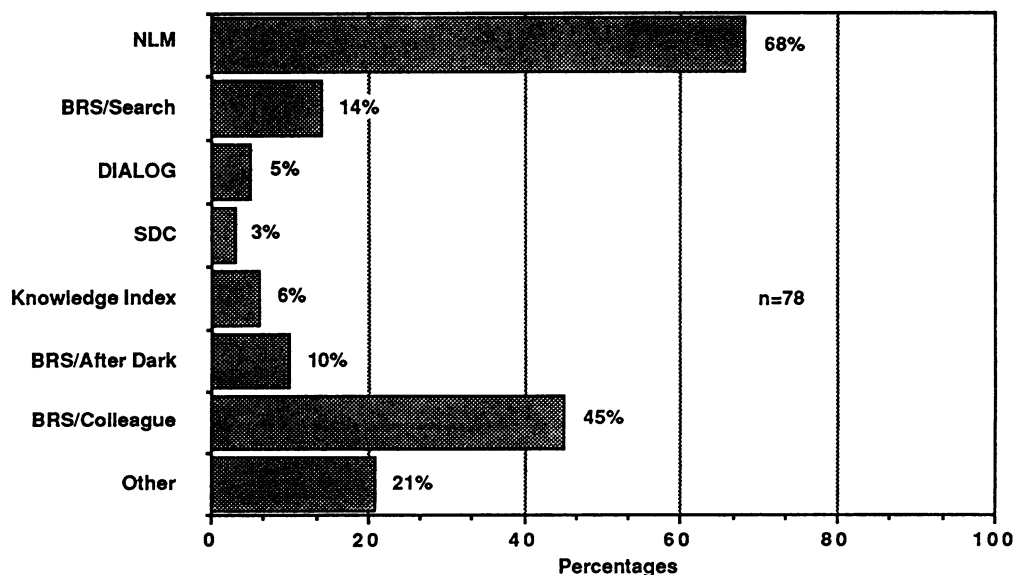


FIG. 4.—Systems taught to end users.

*Future Research*

Areas for future research are suggested by the data. A follow-up survey could show the expansion of existing programs, the development of new programs, and the impact of new technologies such as CD-ROM. A second survey could focus on observations from open-ended responses, e.g., those concerning self-esteem. The impact of end-user searching on other library services would be more clear in a survey now, as the programs have been in existence for more than a year. Another area is comparison of libraries that have programs with those that do not.

*CONCLUSIONS*

In this study we found great diversity in end-user programs in medical school libraries. Formal courses in end-user searching provided by library staff were most prevalent. The unanticipated increased self-esteem and respect may well be the most satisfactory aspect of the program. Beginning and maintaining programs often place great demands on library staff and equipment. However, in general, the respondents were positive about the end-user program and its future in the library. Many programs were still considered experimental, with planning for the future ongoing. Even with the resulting stress and overwork cited by many respondents, none planned to discontinue the program. Future plans included training more library personnel, additional equipment, and new program components, such as searching clinics, newsletters, and user groups. The findings seem to indicate that end-user programs are developing rapidly and will

remain in libraries in various forms in the immediate future.

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