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ASSIGNMENT 5: Subject Analysis
LIS 2001 – Spring 2006

Owen, D.J. and Fang, M.E. (2003). Information-seeking Behavior in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM): An Online Survey of Faculty at a Health Sciences Campus. *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 91 (3): 311–321

Health professionals seeking information on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are studied to determine the quality and methods used for information retrieval. The 121 respondents, health professionals affiliated with the University of California, San Francisco, completed a web-based survey answering multiple choice and open-ended questions. CAM information from thirteen main areas of interest was sought for use in clinical settings, teaching, research, publications, and grant proposals. The average length of time spent searching for information was thirty minutes, with 51% considering their most recent search to be only partially successful. When asked to rank the usefulness of sources, the highest ranking source was colleagues (with 46% ranking them as "somewhat" or "very useful"), followed by the Web (41%), journals (40%), databases (33%), books (25%), librarians (6%), and "other" (2%). More specifically, 87% rated the database MEDLINE as useful, though few used BIOSIS Previews (11%) or the free CAM Citation Index (9%). No statistically significant correlations were found between specialty and CAM information-seeking behaviors, however this is due to the small sample size and some interesting trends may warrant further investigation. Health professionals frequently did not find the information they sought, and rely too heavily on MEDLINE and Web-based resources. Most often health professionals choose the information resource that is most readily available, easily accessible, and easy to use, leaving them unfamiliar with several important CAM resources.

Derived Indexing Terms

1. Information-seeking
2. Behavior
3. Complementary and alternative medicine
4. Health professionals
5. Information resources

Assigned Indexing Terms (Terms selected from the PsycINFO thesaurus)

1. Information Seeking
2. Behavior
3. Alternative Medicine
4. Health Personnel
5. Information Services

Assigned Indexing Terms (Terms selected from the Medical Subject Headings thesaurus (MeSH))

1. Information Services
2. Behavior
3. Complementary Therapies
4. Health Personnel
5. Information Storage and Retrieval

Discussion

I think that the MeSH terms described the content with the most specificity, especially regarding the aspect of information retrieval. The PsycINFO thesaurus associates 'information retrieval' specifically with 'automated' and is a narrower term of 'information services'. However, to me, 'information services' seemed equally inaccurate as specifying 'automated information retrieval', and without a defining scope note it was hard to make a decision on which term to use. However, I think that the PsycINFO terms would provide better access to the article because they contain subject headings that are closer to the natural language of [my] abstract of the article. It seems to me that 'alternative medicine' would be a more common term people would use to describe 'CAM', however it may be different for actual health professionals (*see* Health Personnel ☺) who may instinctively search for 'complementary therapies'.

While it seems that both lists of terms have their pros and cons, I feel that overall the MeSH terms did a better job of accurately capturing the whole concept of the article. Because MeSH gives a definition of 'information services', you can see verify that it is a synonymous concept to the natural language used. The specificity of MeSH and the exhaustivity of the terms in describing the article combine to make the MeSH terms more accurate, and I feel they would provide more than adequate access, despite their difference from the natural language.