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Teaching how to read and write science: a library-journal partnership

Context

Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ) is a general medical journal published in English and the only Croatian medical journal covered by the Current Contents. The Central Medical Library (CML) is the most important Croatian medical library serving as a central point of biomedical information. Both are functioning under the auspices of the Croatia's largest and oldest medical school, the Zagreb University School of Medicine.

Starting point

The CMJ started in 1992 and its editorial board asked CML for help in formulating exchange policy and bringing best editorial practice to the local setting. When CMJ introduced an "author-helpful" policy, CML assisted the authors in finding literature and organizing the references. CMJ also co-opted the head-librarian on the editorial board.

Teaching how to read and write science

The CMJ editorial board learned that Croatian physicians had important and interesting data but no skills for presenting them in a scientific article. To alleviate the lack of education in research methods and writing, a mandatory course in scientific methodology and communication was developed and introduced into the school's curriculum. The course has been running since 1995/1996 focussing on (1) principles of scientific research, (2) access to medical literature, (3) study design and presentation of data and (4) writing a scientific article. The course has three components: lectures, discussions in medium-sized groups and problem-solving in small groups. Three librarians are participating in the course carrying out a core lecture and hands-on problem-solving exercises using PubMed.

CMJ and CML started two continuing education courses in 2002 and 2004, respectively: "Planning and Writing about Research in Medicine" and "Finding and Appraisal Medical Information". The courses are aimed at young academic physicians and general medicine practitioners. The courses have been highly rated by the Croatian Medical Chamber, which serves as a relicensing body.

Where next?

CMJ and CML developed two electives in evidence-based medicine ("The importance of finding good evidence" and "Research data analysis and writing research report"), which are to be introduced in the next academic year. Another collaborative effort ("CMJ answers to your clinical question") consists of developing a web service on the CMJ's web site to help Croatian physicians in transferring the evidence-based medicine principles into the clinical practice. A librarian will be responsible for searching and critical appraisal of evidence.

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