Introduction

The scramble to seek pertinent medical information is a complex matter. Before libraries can meet information needs effectively, we must know the purpose for seeking the information, the type of information sought, and how users ask their questions. However, a major problem often exists with online retrieval of information, because it may not be indexed and organized in an accessible manner.

Several papers that focus on issues in information gathering for education and patient care have been highlighted in this section. The first article, a presentation on "Information-Seeking Behaviors by Medical Students," focuses on a user study of the types of questions students ask librarians and faculty. The results can be used to design information and educational systems. The next paper, "Using Focus Groups to Discover Health Professionals' Information Needs," is a methods study to determine effective data-gathering tools. Theoretical and practical methodology are covered as a means of collecting feedback from library users. The last paper on "Practice Guidelines: A Piece of the Quality Puzzle" covers issues concerning the need to provide guidelines to improve quality of patient care and discusses the National Library of Medicine's response to the development of a whole new area of information of interest to physicians. This information can be used for medical decision making.

The conclusion to be drawn from these papers is that the way information is stored, indexed, organized, and packaged has a direct impact on the success users have in obtaining information for medical decision making. Although there are varied ways to do this—user queries, theoretical studies, and use of established guidelines—all are recent attempts to improve information-seeking methods that are useful to consider.

Naomi C. Broering
Editor