HIGHLIGHTING EMERGING ROLES AND ENDURING VALUES: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN NURSING EDUCATION

Introduction*

This section highlights papers originally presented at an annual meeting of the Medical Library Association as a means of exploring new ways in which librarians are working with nursing faculty and students. These papers examine two roles: collaborating with faculty to develop an integrated curriculum of information management education; and assisting faculty in the comprehensive tracking of citations as a means of measuring contribution to the knowledge base. These roles may all be viewed as components of what we now call nursing informatics, the application of the knowledge-based systems of nursing science, library science, and computer science to clinical decision making. While the terminology and technology for use of the nursing literature have changed, especially over the last twenty years, the enduring value remains the same, improved patient outcome.

Critical to the successful practice of any health care profession is the ability to identify, assess, synthesize, apply, report, and manage information from a variety of sources. Today’s student of the health sciences must have a firm grasp of subject content and basic research and database skills for clinical problem solving. During the past twenty years, the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association has tracked the evolution of bibliographic instruction from a library-centered, tool-based introductory lecture to a problem-based series of information management classes presenting increasingly complex concepts and techniques. Unlike the single lecture, these classes are integrated across the professional curriculum. Allegri provides a comprehensive summary of the earliest articles on this subject as they appeared in the Bulletin and other journals from 1975 through 1984 [1].

More recently, in the July 1985 issue of the Bulletin, Smith and Salisbury describe a fifteen-hour learning module on bibliographic research and critical logic integrated into a required course for graduate students in health care administration [2]. Students synthesized information from a broad variety of sources, analyzed the information critically, and applied it to the process of managerial decision making.

Graves and Selig report that the library at the University of Tennessee Center for the Health Sciences developed a sequential program of increasingly complex skills taught as needed throughout a four-year medical school curriculum [3]. The April 1986 Bulletin article states that Tennessee students learned how to identify, access, and synthesize information from a broad variety of sources for patient-care decision making. The program of information management skills also included a component on constructing electronic personal information systems. Graves and Selig include course content and evaluative methods as well.

The study by Mueller and Foreman at the University of Minnesota Medical School, published in the July 1987 Bulletin, focuses on the development of a course for junior and senior medical students to include instruction in literature research strategies, information management, and building and managing a personal library [4]. The article features the contents of the six classes and an evaluation of the program.

In a “Brief Communication” in the July 1988 Bulletin, Fitch provides one of the first descriptions of a program of information skills integrated into a nursing curriculum [5].

By 1989 Burrows et al. report in the Bulletin that curriculum integration had continued to gain acceptance as an effective approach to teaching information skills in the medical school setting [6]. The authors describe a program of progressively complex information management skills integrated into the first two years of the curriculum at the University of Miami School of Medicine, including a description of the information skills component and the evaluation data.

The following year the Bulletin carried an article by Wood et al. in its January issue [7]. This paper covers the development of an information management program integrated into the classes of all four years of a pharmacy school curriculum.

Eldredge’s recent case study, published in the July 1993 issue of the Bulletin, describes experimental approaches to curriculum integration [8]. Eldredge worked with a combination of required and elective information management classes integrated into the four years of both the problem based learning and traditional tracks of the University of New Mexico’s School of Medicine. The author also explores a planning process for integrating information management into a new curriculum for the medical school.

While the emergence of information management education in the curricula of medical, pharmacy, and hospital administration programs is well documented over the last twenty years, there has been little exploration in the published literature of the application of information management to nursing education. The annual meetings of the Medical Library Association, however, have showcased some excellent work on this topic. One of the earliest papers, "A First Offering in Nursing Informatics," was presented by Schick at the Annual Meeting in 1991 [9]. Schick developed a stand-alone elective course in information management for graduate nursing students. Within a year the course was required for all graduate students in the nursing program. It is now being fully integrated into the curriculum. At the 1993 meeting, Burnham described the information management programs developed for the Colleges of Nursing, Medicine and Allied Health at the University of South Alabama [10]. The paper was published the following year [11].

The initial two papers in this section present some of the first truly substantive descriptions of information management course content in nursing curricula. Francis and Fisher provide a sound rationale for integrating information management into nursing education and share a thorough description of the program content for each of the three levels of entry in the nursing program at the University of Florida. Focusing on the strategies of excellent communication and high quality instruction, Layton and Hahn trace the library faculty's development of programs of knowledge management instruction and their integration into the School of Nursing at Johns Hopkins University.

An important component of information management education is the creation of a personal file of articles and references or citations. Accurate citation tracking brings the process full circle by assessing actual impact of research on an expanding knowledge base. To conclude the section, Reed reviews a variety of methods for tracking citations as a means of assessing faculty contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

**References**