

For immediate release - Statement on the Importance of Hospital Libraries

One of the defining issues of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the frustration of leaders, governments, educators, health professionals and communities over what has been termed an “infodemic.”¹ The Canadian Health Libraries Association / Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada issued [a statement at the beginning of the pandemic](#) on the importance of evidence-based information.

Hospital library workers have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting infodemic, supplying urgently needed evidence to health professionals and decision-makers in a rapidly evolving environment. Decision-makers have complained publicly about the problem of misinformation and information overload during COVID-19. However, we continue to see an alarming trend of hospital library closures, budget cuts, and reduction of library staff or redeployment of library staff to other duties, without careful consideration of the impact on timely access to evidence. This access is a high priority criteria for Accreditation Canada², as well as built into affiliation agreements with medical schools, underlining its importance.

Hospital libraries and their staff are integral to healthcare organizations. We know that using best evidence to inform practice correlates with improved patient outcomes and satisfaction, as well as quality improvement.³⁻¹⁰ Library workers bridge the gap between research and practice, by providing access to best evidence and reducing barriers to evidence-based practice (EBP).^{5,6,11,12,13} Hospital library workers and resources help improve clinical decision making, prevent adverse events, reduce unnecessary treatments or referrals, aid in informed decision-making about treatment and patient management, and reduce length of stay.^{7,10,14-21} Evidence-based information often resides behind a considerable paywall²¹ and university libraries cannot be used to replace hospital libraries and hospital staff access to their subscribed resources, without formal agreements in place to account for resource licensing costs. University libraries are resourced and staffed with a specific focus, and may not have adequate human resources to serve the needs of affiliate hospital staff. Nurses and allied health staff are particularly impacted by these limitations as fewer hold cross appointments and they do not have access to resources through association memberships. In many provinces, hospital libraries are the only specialized health information support options for clinicians and decision-makers.²³ Inequity in access to evidence between academic and non-academic milieux also creates inequities of access to information for the most underserved and vulnerable populations, and hospital libraries play an important role in providing access to information for health professionals serving these groups.

At the best of times, it is difficult to understand why decision-makers would choose to cut a valuable health resource given the evidence on the value of hospital libraries. During a pandemic, it is deeply concerning. We ask those managing hospital libraries to carefully consider the vital support these departments offer their organizations before weighing any cuts to the budget or redeploying skilled library staff to perform other duties, particularly during a

pandemic. A hospital without a library is missing a key part of the healthcare team, and cannot in good conscience claim to be providing evidence-based care to their patients.

We urge decision-makers to take concrete action, refer to the [CHLA/ABSC Standards for Library and Information Services in Canadian Health & Social Services Institutions](#) (2020), and work with health information professionals to ensure that hospital libraries continue to provide access to best evidence and to support healthcare providers in evidence-based practice.

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