Conducting the Consumer Health Reference Interview

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What is a Health Reference Interview?

- Conversation between library staff member and a library patron.
- The goal is to determine the patron’s information need and then take appropriate steps to connect individual to the resources that will address and respond to it.
Conducting the Health Reference Interview

- Open vs. Closed Questions
- Unfamiliar Terms
- Talk-Back Technique
- Sharing Difficult Information
- Special Circumstances
  - Patrons with Limited English Speaking Ability
  - Patrons with Impaired Hearing
Start with Hello

- Connect to your library patron with a smile and a hello.
- Ask, “What may I help you with today?”
Use Open-Ended Questions

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- How?
- Why?
WHO?

- Who is the information for?
• What is the exact diagnosis?
  ○ Explain many medical words sound alike and you don’t want to provide wrong medical information.
  ○ If individual is unsure or doesn’t know, STOP.
  ○ Suggest your patron call the healthcare clinic where they received their care and ask for correct diagnosis, including spelling.

• Don’t guess
  ○ If in doubt, don’t proceed.
WHERE?

- Where have you looked already?
- Where are you receiving your care?
WHEN?

- When are you having the test done? the procedure? the surgery? your next appointment?
National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM)

https://nnlm.gov
How much information do you want?
WHY?

- Why do you need this information? e.g. personal use or school report?
Closed Questions

- Elicit “yes” or “no” answers.
- Help you narrow the focus of the reference interview.
- Wrap things up by confirming you understand the health reference question or that the information you have provided meets the patron’s need.
Examples: Closed Questions

- Is this what you were looking for?
- Does this meet your needs?
- Will you need treatment information?
Summarize Your Understanding

- Use the parrot, or talk-back technique to verify your understanding.
  e.g. “I understand you are interested in finding out how relapsing polychondritis is diagnosed. Is that correct?”
As you begin your information search

- Look up acronyms
e.g. AMI = Acute Myocardial Infarction (heart attack)
- Define unfamiliar terms
e.g. the diagnosis
- Verify spelling
Teach as You Research

- Share your search strategy and resources with your patron as you work to answer their question.
Know Where to Go

• Bookmark trusted health information websites
  ○ MedlinePlus  https://medlineplus.gov/
  ○ KidsHealth  http://kidshealth.org/
  ○ LabtestsOnline  https://labtestsonline.org/
  ○ National Cancer Institute  https://www.cancer.gov/
  ○ Family Doctor  https://familydoctor.org/
  ○ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  https://www.cdc.gov/
  ○ HealthReach (Health Info in Many Languages)  https://healthreach.nlm.nih.gov/
Explain limitations

- Always encourage individuals to discuss health information they obtain in the library with their healthcare provider.
- Information obtained may or may not apply to the patron’s unique “clinical picture” – only their healthcare provider can explain how the information may or may not apply to the individual.
- You are not a healthcare provider.
Discovering Difficult Information

- Information you uncover may indicate a poor outcome.
Handling Difficult Information

- Maintain composure & professionalism.
- Ask whether or not physician has explained the diagnosis.
- If yes, proceed with:
  - reference interview
  - sharing information you’ve found.
- Offer comfort measures.
Handling Difficult Information

- If no, maintain your composure & professionalism
- Prepare individual to receive difficult information. Say something like, “I’m concerned about the nature of the information you may find on this condition as it may be distressing. I’m sure you’ll want to discuss what you read with your doctor who will be able to explain how this information does or does not apply to your health.”
- Offer comfort measures.
Communication Tips for Special Reference Interviews: Limited English Proficiency

- Speak slowly. Use short, simple sentences.
- Face the individual & speak directly to him or her.
- Use pictures or illustrations to aid communication.
- Be patient & repeat if necessary.
- Have a language identification list or flash cards available so individuals can identify their native language.
  
  https://www.lep.gov/resources/resources.html#MM
- If you have interpreter services available, call them.
- Use the universal “ok?” to ascertain understanding.
Communication Tips for Special Reference Interviews: Impaired Hearing

- Speak slowly. Enunciate clearly. Face the individual so he or she can read your lips.
- Shorten the distance between the two of you. Stand still as you speak.
- Speak loudly but don’t shout.
- Choose different words if the individual doesn’t understand you. Some words are easier for the individual to recognize.
- Move the individual away from areas where there is a lot of background noise, such as a busy reference desk, so he or she can concentrate on your conversation.
HIPAA & Health Reference

- HIPAA = Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act
  - Covered entities:
    - Health Plans
    - Clearinghouses
    - Providers
- Public Libraries are not bound by HIPAA
- Health Sciences Libraries, e.g. hospital, academic medical center etc. are bound by HIPAA
Collecting Health Reference Data

- Jot down subject of health reference requests, e.g. arthritis in the knee, pituitary tumor treatment, Raynaud’s Disease
- Review over time (e.g. monthly) to identify trends, resource needs, programming ideas and staff knowledge gaps.


About the Book

Comprised of thirteen chapters written by experienced consumer health librarians, *The Medical Library Association Guide to Providing Consumer and Patient Health Information* is designed for library and information science graduate students as well as librarians new to health and medical librarianship, regardless of library setting. It is comprehensive in scope, covering all aspects of consumer and patient health and medical information.

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Questions?
Thank you!

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