Published in final edited form as:

Med Ref Serv Q. 2017 ; 36(4): 348–361. doi:10.1080/02763869.2017.1369283.

Piloting Consumer Health Information Services in Collaboration with a Community Research Engagement Program

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Abstract

At an academic health science center, librarians partnered with a community research engagement program to offer a suite of consumer health information services. The services included training staff in the use of online consumer health resources, purchasing a print collection of monographs, and creating a guide to both the online and print resources for staff use. Focus groups were conducted to assess information needs, and the workshop attendees' online health information competency was assessed pre- and post-session. This paper details planning and intervention efforts, and proposes future activities to meet the information needs of HealthStreet and its clients.

Keywords

Community engagement; community organizations; consumer health; HealthStreet; information needs; training

Introduction

Librarians at the Health Science Center Libraries (HSCL) at the University of Florida (UF) serve users with a diverse array of information needs, from undergraduate students learning how to find and evaluate research, to researchers with complex data and information requests, to clinicians who require evidence-based data for their practice. In addition to these

traditional patron groups, HSCL librarians work with community outreach groups, many of which are rooted in departments and institutes at UF. As part of her role in pursuing consumer health information services opportunities in the UF community, the newly-hired Nursing & Consumer Health Liaison Librarian met with leaders at HealthStreet, a UF community engagement program, to explore a potential partnership in which a suite of selected consumer health information services would be added to the services that HealthStreet staff provides.

HealthStreet was developed in partnership between UF's Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) and the Department of Epidemiology to reduce disparities in health services and research, by reaching out to underserved populations in the community<<http://healthstreet.program.ufl.edu/>>. HealthStreet staff offers services, from simple resources like a clothing closet and toiletry pantry, to referrals to no or low-cost health and social services in the area. To provide services that meet the specific needs of the individual, each community member's needs and concerns are assessed with a standardized intake form by Community Health Workers (CHWs). The data from this assessment is also used to give people opportunities to hear about relevant health research at UF, and if the community member is interested, HealthStreet staff facilitates their recruitment into an appropriate study. Another goal of HealthStreet is to close the research loop by hosting and promoting bi-directional discussions of research results with community members through Our Community, Our Health national town hall events. HealthStreet's facility also hosts a variety of community events, such as USDA-sponsored cooking classes, grass-roots initiated support groups, yoga classes, and free therapy nights delivered by medical students.

HealthStreet serves as a connector between members of the community and health and social services similar to that of the HSCL's liaison librarians, who link students, researchers, and clinicians to the information resources they need.^{1, 2} Since HealthStreet was already connecting the medically underserved to health and social services, it seemed a natural progression for HSCL to add information services to that list, which was supported in the literature by a 2015 survey of a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults.³ This survey found a correlation between patient activation (that is, how confidently and persistently a person takes action to maintain and improve their health⁴) and the likelihood of accessing health information online. Because HealthStreet's users actively pursue improved health, the hypothesis was that they would be more likely to seek out health information, particularly if that information was freely available in a convenient location like HealthStreet. Similar collaborations between health navigators and librarians to provide consumer health information to underserved medical populations have resulted in increased use of consumer health resources and services.^{5, 6} To support this collaboration, HealthStreet and the HSCL successfully pursued funding from the UF Libraries Strategic Opportunities grant program for a project piloting consumer health information services at HealthStreet.

Project

The pilot project consisted of four main activities: 1) a qualitative and quantitative information needs assessment of HealthStreet staff and (indirectly) the community members who utilize HealthStreet's services, 2) purchasing and installing at the HealthStreet facility a

small print collection of consumer health monographs, 3) training of HealthStreet staff and volunteers on consumer health information resources, and 4) creating a quick-reference guide to both print and online resources for use by HealthStreet staff and community members, organized according to subject. The funding covered approximately \$4,000 for a tablet and accessories to conduct the training and for the CHWs to use to access consumer health websites while they were out in the community, as well as the cost of approximately 100 monographs.

Information Needs Assessment

In order to design training and purchase materials relevant to the needs of HealthStreet staff and the community members they serve, HSCL librarians conducted an information needs assessment, comprised of focus group data and data from HealthStreet's health intake form, which all community members complete during registration for HealthStreet services. Two focus groups were held with HealthStreet staff, gauging their interest in, experience with, and process of finding health information online, as well as the perceived health information needs of the community members who utilize HealthStreet's services. These one-hour focus groups were held at the HealthStreet facility, were facilitated by two HSCL librarians, included approximately four to six participants each, and were loosely structured with a series of general questions (see the Appendix for the IRB-02-exempted question sheet). Both sessions were recorded, and transcribed, and an initial analysis was conducted to guide the workshop design and book purchasing. A more in-depth thematic analysis of the focus group data was conducted after project completion. Saturation was reached after two groups because no new information was gained after the second session, thus, additional groups were unnecessary.

This thematic analysis was conducted with guidance from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Outreach Evaluation Resource Center's booklets on Planning and Evaluating Health Information Outreach Projects.⁷ The two librarians who facilitated the focus groups separately read through the transcripts and noted recurring themes, then met to discuss their findings and to create a list of categories and subcategories of conversation (see Table 1). After identifying categories, the librarians re-examined the transcripts and coded the text accordingly.

The analysis of the focus groups with HealthStreet staff revealed several themes relevant to the challenges and opportunities of working with medically underserved populations. Of particular note is the way HealthStreet staff described their skillsets, and how they defined the limits of their role. The CHWs repeatedly mentioned experiencing many of the same challenges that paralleled those faced by health sciences librarians. Tables 2 and 3 describe the two themes of Information Service Provision and Role Description, providing examples of how HealthStreet CHWs navigate their interactions with community members. the focus groups, HealthStreet staff described an intuitive understanding of the importance of critically evaluating health information, demonstrating preferences for some sources of information over other sources perceived less reliable, although staff disagreed on the trustworthiness of some resources (like WebMD). Table 4 provides an example of the type of resource that

HealthStreet staff turned to when looking for health information prior to attending the training workshop.

At the same time, HealthStreet staff recognized several areas in which they could expand their services, if they had the requisite resources and skillsets. Tables 5 and 6 describe the resources and skillset gaps that HealthStreet staff identified during the focus groups. The librarians found this information to be crucial when customizing the workshop and print monograph collection appropriately (see Discussion below).

In addition to this qualitative assessment, the librarians used quantitative data gathered from HealthStreet's health intake form about the health concerns of HealthStreet's users to customize workshop and collection interventions. This information was compiled into an annual community health needs assessment report.⁸ Hypertension, diabetes, and dental issues were the three most common health concerns reported by community members at the time of this report through HealthStreet's health intake form. They are also consistent with data nationally from the Sentinel Network initiative.⁹

Creating a Consumer Health Library

Using data from the information needs assessment and the intake compilation, and guided by recommendations from the Consumer and Patient Health Information Section of the Medical Library Association,¹⁰ a small collection of print consumer health monographs was purchased; the list of titles is available online at <<https://goo.gl/85FKhE>>. The books were processed and added to the University of Florida Libraries Catalog, then placed in a specially-designated Health Resource Room at the HealthStreet facility. The books are accessible to HealthStreet staff, community members, and any UF-affiliated students, staff, or faculty for in-room use. The Health Resource Room is publicly accessible to visitors accompanied by a staff member when the HealthStreet facility is open. While a circulating collection would have allowed for increased use of the collection, the staff time, training, and equipment required to provide check-out services were more than the scope of this project allowed for, particularly as a pilot project. A future evaluation of the use of this collection is described in the Discussion below.

Developing, Conducting, and Evaluating the Impact of the Consumer Health Workshop

Based on the information from the needs assessment and intake form compilation, a one-hour consumer health workshop was designed and delivered to HealthStreet staff at their monthly staff meeting. This training included a demonstration of quality online consumer health resources, such as websites like MedlinePlus<<https://medlineplus.gov/>>, ClinicalTrials.gov <<https://clinicaltrials.gov/>>, and Genetics Home Reference<<https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/>>. It also included strategies for determining the quality of a given consumer health website and gave HealthStreet staff tools to use when teaching health information evaluation skills to the community members they work with. These strategies and tools were based on the principles of Health on the Net Foundation's Code of Conduct.¹¹ The presentation slides are available online at <<https://goo.gl/FMZi6X>>, and are freely available for reuse with attribution.

In order to assess the workshop's impact on HealthStreet staff's ability to search for, evaluate, and use health information online, the eHealth Literacy Scale (eHEALS)¹² was distributed to participants before and after the workshop. The eHEALS is an eight-item questionnaire using a Likert scale to measure a person's self-perceived knowledge of and ability to use health resources on the Internet. Participants created anonymous numerical codes on their questionnaires so that any changes to an individual's health information self-efficacy post-workshop could be tracked. Numeric values were assigned to each item's response choices on a Likert scale, from 1-4, with the lower point values being assigned to responses that indicate less self-efficacy when searching for health information online. The point values from each item were then totaled for each questionnaire, creating a sum "health information self-efficacy" score for the participant. Ten pre- and post-test sets of data were collected; see Figure 1 for the full data set of health information self-efficacy score changes for each participant.

During the workshop, HealthStreet staff appeared very engaged with the information being presented, and qualitative feedback from participants was universally positive. Before the workshop, participants' total eHEALS scores were, on average, 20.7, out of maximum possible 32. After the workshop, participants' total eHEALS scores increased to an average 27.7, an increase of 34%. Nine out of the ten participants had their scores increase; one participant's score stayed the same after the workshop, scoring 24 out of 32 possible points, well above the average of the pre-workshop scores, which indicated a high level of confidence even before the workshop. Two specific areas of improvement were noted in the answers to the questions, "I know what health resources are available on the Internet," and "I have the skills I need to evaluate the health resources I find on the Internet." The class-wide scores for these questions increased by 46% and 40%, respectively. These results reflect the workshop's emphasis on identifying reliable sources of health information and evaluating the quality of health information online. Figure 2 illustrates the level of improvement over each of the eight questions of the eHEALS instrument.

Designing a Quick-Reference Resource Guide

One resource that HealthStreet staff specifically requested was the creation of a quick-reference guide to both the print consumer health monographs and the online health information resources included in the workshop. The guide, which was designed collaboratively with the HealthStreet staff, includes two sections: a table of websites with descriptions and navigational tips that is organized by information need (see Table 7), and a list of print monographs organized by subject in alphabetical order.

Copies of this quick-reference guide were distributed to all HealthStreet staff, with the idea that they could be kept close to their workstations where the initial health assessment interview with new community members takes place. This way, the HealthStreet staff member could easily refer to the guide during the course of the interview, should the community member make any health information needs known. After the interview, community members are given a tour of the facility, including the clothing closet, toiletry pantry, and finally, the resource room where the print collection is displayed. Copies of the

quick-reference guide are also kept in the room, so that community members can use it to find the resource they need.

Discussion

Community Healthy Workers as Information Paraprofessionals

One of the most intriguing themes discovered through analysis of the focus groups was how similar the skillsets, challenges, and needs of HealthStreet staff are to those of health science librarians. As medical paraprofessionals, HealthStreet staff act as liaisons between community members and local health and social service providers, facilitating but not providing care. The boundaries of the CHW role often go unrecognized by the people they serve, and they are often asked to provide services beyond their expertise and role, such as giving medical advice. This is a challenge that librarians themselves regularly experience, when faced with patrons asking for medical or legal help. HealthStreet staff navigate their role well, despite these challenges, using their best judgement to determine how to handle these kinds of requests.

HealthStreet staff, like librarians, must also be familiar with a broad variety of (local) health (and social) services resources, in order to determine what resource is best suited to the particular needs of the patron (community member) they are serving. The intake process at HealthStreet is in many ways similar to a reference interview at a library; through the standardized list of intake questions, HealthStreet staff discover what health concerns and needs are most important to their users, in the same way that librarians draw out a patron's true information need. Librarians then call upon their extensive knowledge of information resources to find the best resource to help their patron, just as HealthStreet staff do.

It is not surprising, then, that during the focus groups, HealthStreet staff, even though not formally trained as information professionals, have been able to articulate the importance of finding trustworthy health information, name specific authoritative information resources that they regularly turned to, as well as provide rudimentary techniques for evaluating the quality of health information. They were also able to specify both health topics that they would like more information on (like mental health), as well as formats of information that would be most useful to them and their users (such as pamphlets and resource guides). This understanding of the importance of providing quality information and resources to their users made HealthStreet staff ideal participants in consumer health information training.

Relevant Training and Resource Collections

The information needs assessment impacted the selection of materials for the consumer health collection in two distinct ways: it reinforced the need for monographs related to common health concerns, such as diet and exercise; and it bolstered the decision to purchase monographs on more sensitive subjects, such as mental health. This reflects two different needs that HealthStreet members have. On the one hand, they need resources on common topics with somewhat standard information (e.g., eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, and exercise regularly) to help lessen the time taken to answer the same questions repeatedly. On

the other hand, staff needed resources on more delicate topics that may not be best addressed in a face-to-face conversation.

The focus groups also made it clear the HealthStreet staff were already somewhat skilled at evaluating the quality of health information online. As a result, the health resource evaluation section of the consumer health information workshop was expanded to include two different sets of tips for evaluating health information online. The simpler “5 W’s” approach of asking Who, Why, What, Where, and When was introduced as a way to explain to the community how to evaluate health information, while the more complex Health on the Net Principles added more depth to HealthStreet staff’s understanding of evaluation.

Training Medical Paraprofessionals to be Information Paraprofessionals

The goal of the consumer health information training was to improve HealthStreet staff’s awareness of trustworthy online health information resources like MedlinePlus, while also giving them the tools to evaluate the quality of health information on any website. The increased confidence and self-efficacy demonstrated by the increased eHEALS scores after training was a strong indicator of success in this area. The long-term effects of this training have yet to be seen, but given the low cost and reduced time of providing training in the form of short, focused workshops, this project should encourage other health science librarians to seek opportunities to provide consumer health information training to medical paraprofessionals in their communities, and UF HSCL librarians will make this training a recurring event.

One challenge faced in conducting the workshop that other libraries might consider is the issue of finding an appropriate teaching space – most community health organizations are not equipped with computer labs that allow for a more interactive and participatory training session. Such is the case for HealthStreet, so the workshop was hosted in a large conference room at the HealthStreet facility, which limited participants’ ability to engage and explore the resources in-class. Consumer health librarians planning outreach projects may be faced with a choice between a location that is convenient, facilitating attendance, and one that has more equipment, facilitating engagement.

Future Plans

The focus group revealed several opportunities for additional collaboration between HealthStreet and the Health Science Center Libraries, beyond the scope of this pilot project. One need articulated by HealthStreet staff was for “better takeaways,” that is, an up-to-date collection of brochures, pamphlets, or other handouts on a broad variety of topics. HealthStreet currently has a collection of pamphlets in the Health Resource Room with the consumer health monograph collection. Librarians at the Health Science Center can use their collection development expertise to develop a system to catalog the current collection of pamphlets, determine what types of pamphlets are needed, and assess how frequently they need to be updated or replaced. This resource evaluation could be incorporated into the planned evaluation of the use of the consumer health monograph collection.

Given the natural turnover of HealthStreet staff and volunteers (who are often UF students), it will also be important to refresh and reinforce the training at regular intervals, to ensure

that HealthStreet staff continue to retain the skills and knowledge of resources to assist their users. A follow-up focus group with HealthStreet staff is planned to evaluate how staff have incorporated the online and print resources into their work, to determine the ideal intervals for training sessions (biannually, annually, etc.), and to identify any gaps or areas of improvement for future training sessions.

The goal of continuing to expand the skillset of HealthStreet staff and refine the health information resources available at HealthStreet is ultimately to make it possible for HealthStreet staff to train the public in the use of consumer health resources, either individually or in group sessions, according to their users' needs. This also increases trust between the community and the research enterprise, one of the goals of HealthStreet and the library scientists.¹³ HealthStreet staff have spent time and energy developing relationships with underserved members of the community and are looked to as a trusted resource. This makes them the ideal host or contact for training on trustworthy health information resources. With that in mind, one line of inquiry at the follow-up focus group will be on HealthStreet staff's instructional skills and their users' openness to training sessions.

Conclusion

The close and collaborative partnership between HealthStreet and the Health Science Center Libraries provided a solid foundation on which to base a pilot suite of consumer health information services. The information needs assessment and evaluation data demonstrated that CHWs and medical librarians face similar challenges in ensuring that their users have relevant, up-to-date, and accurate health information that meet their needs. The enthusiastic participation of HealthStreet staff in the needs assessment and training, their increase in confidence navigating consumer health information online, and the support of HealthStreet and HSCL administration has opened the door to further collaborative projects in the future, and provides a bridge between a university-based library and the members of the community they seek to serve.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

Funding: HealthStreet is supported in part by the UF CTSI, which is itself supported in part by three grants awarded on August 15, 2015, through the National Institutes of Health's Clinical and Translational Science Awards program, which is led by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. The UF CTSI grant year begins April 1, and the UF CTSI's current grant numbers are UL1TR001427, KL2TR001429, and TL1TR001428.

The project described in this article was sponsored by the UF Smathers Libraries Strategic Opportunities Grant Program, project number SO44.

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Figure 1. eHEALS Score Changes

Figure 2. Question-Level Improvement

Table 1
Coding Categories for Thematic Analysis of Focus Groups

Category	Definition	Subcategories
Health Topics	Areas of interest related to health; includes areas of interest to both HealthStreet staff and the community members they serve.	Dental, Diet, Diseases & Disorders, Exercise, Healthcare, Mental, Social, Other
Resources	People, things, and places that HealthStreet staff turn to when searching for health information.	People, Place, Print, Website, Other
Needs	Resources, skills, and materials that HealthStreet staff need but do not currently have.	Resources, Skillsets, Other
Services Provided	Actions and assistance provided by HealthStreet staff as part of their normal effort.	Actions (referrals, use of the clothing closet or toiletry pantry), Information (resources, teaching, counseling), Other
Limitations	Resources and services that are outside the scope of HealthStreet's mission.	Medical Advice, Medical Care, Other

Table 2
Information Service Provision Theme

Upper-Level Category:	Services Provided
Lower-Level Category:	Information
Definition:	HealthStreet staff described situations in which they directed community members to printed materials (brochures kept on-site) and online resources (websites). They also were comfortable explaining medical terminology during the course of the initial health assessment interview.
Quote:	“There's a lot of resources for cancer on the web...there's the Cancer Institute, there's a number of them out there that I'm comfortable with either referring people to or going on and looking for things.”

Table 3
Role Description Theme

Upper-Level Category:	Limitations
Lower-Level Category:	Medical Advice
Definition:	HealthStreet staff understood their role as a referral service, but often faced challenges from community members who would ask for medical advice; they have developed methods for handling those kinds of inquiries.
Quote:	"I've gotten really specific questions about people's health issues that I really did not feel prepared or comfortable answering. You know, 'I have these symptoms and what do you think that is', and at that point you kind of have to say 'you probably should talk to your doctor about that.'"

Table 4
Online Resources Theme

Upper-Level Category:	Resources
Lower-Level Category:	Websites
Definition:	HealthStreet staff were aware of a variety of websites that they would regularly turn to when looking for health information. They described using Google as a mediating tool to access these sites, rather than going to them directly.
Quote:	"For me personally, MayoClinic and Medscape are my go-tos, for my personal health. If I'm getting information here, for HealthStreet purposes, I'll go to whatever association, like if it's skin cancer, I'll go to the Foundation for Skin Cancer, they usually have a lot of really great materials that we can feed off of."

Table 5
HealthStreet Resource Needs Theme

Upper-Level Category:	HealthStreet/Community Needs
Lower-Level Category:	Resources
Definition:	While HealthStreet staff identified several areas where they had created strong collections of resources (websites, local safety net clinics), they also described having a lack of “takeaway” educational resources that they could give community members. They were a variety of opinions about whether pamphlets or more in-depth resources, like books, would be more useful to their users.
Quote:	A: “So I think one of the things that we could get better at is taking some of the top concerns and health conditions and having it readily available, for community health purposes, but we also need to have that at HealthStreet too.” B: “Like a little information kiosk” A: “Yeah, so if somebody has high blood pressure, let’s give them this good health information”

Table 6
HealthStreet Skillset Needs Theme

Upper-Level Category:	HealthStreet/Community Needs
Lower-Level Category:	Skillsets
Definition:	HealthStreet staff have strong knowledge levels in certain areas – for example, many of the staff had taken the HIV testing and prevention counselor training available from the Florida Department of Health – and were confident in their ability to assist community members with those concerns. With other concerns, like general disease knowledge and mental health issues, HealthStreet staff expressed a desire to learn more.
Quote:	“Mental health is just sort of a grey area, I just wouldn't know where to begin.” “I think we all have the desire to want to be able to have that knowledge [of navigating health information], we just don't; but I think this will really help.”

Table 7
Consumer Health Website Guide

Question/Information Need	Website	Description/Tips for Use
Is looking for specific disease information:	MedlinePlus	Search the specific disease or condition in the search box on the top right hand of the page. Health Topics will have links to many other relevant resources.
Wants to find a relevant research study for their condition:	For UF Trials: HealthStreet National List of Trials: ClinicalTrials.gov	Search the specific disease, filter to “include only open studies”, then select the “On Map” tab to see the results based on their location.
Is concerned about a genetic condition:	Genetics Home Reference	Has information about specific genes, as well as diseases that are caused by genes. Also includes a general easy to read handbook about genetics and a directory of genetics counselors.
Is looking for information about a drug or herbal supplement:	MedlinePlus	Select “Drugs & Supplements” to search by the drugs generic or brand name.
Has a pill or medicine that they can't identify:	Pillbox or Pill Identifier	Can search for pills based on shape, color, or any writing on the pill. Recommended to search both resources for confirmation.
Wants information about a specific lab test that their doctor recommended, or is looking for a test for a specific condition:	Lab Tests Online	Can search for tests based on a variety of abbreviations or nicknames, has information about the purpose of the test, how it is done, and even basic disease information.
Is worried about exposure to household toxins/poisons:	Household Products Database	Includes information about the ingredients in common household products, potential health effects, and tips and tricks for handling products safely. Organized by category.