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Helping the CLINICIAN to help the PATIENT: CareSearch evidence-based information for palliative care

HLA readers will be aware that the 2012 HLA/HCN Health Informatics Innovation Award was won by Sarah Hayman for the CareSearch project, part of the Australian Knowledge Network based at Flinders University. The award was presented at HLA’s Professional Development day in Sydney earlier this year. This is Sarah Hayman’s report on the project.

The CareSearch team is very grateful to both HLA and HCN for the 2012 Innovation award. It is a much-appreciated recognition of the work that our team members do in providing high quality research information to clinicians in the important field of palliative care. Easy access to clinical evidence contributes to improved outcomes for the palliative care patients and their families, friends and carers.

The award funds are being used to develop an online professional development resource for health librarians, introducing some of the methodologies we have investigated and developed through our work on building search filters at CareSearch. We plan to draw out some methods that health librarians and senior researchers can use to improve and validate their personal searches – watch this space!

What is CareSearch?
CareSearch is part of the Australian Knowledge Network project, a major initiative funded...
by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing since 2006 to facilitate access to palliative care literature and evidence for health consumers and health providers. It is designed to support knowledge translation in the palliative care field.

The CareSearch website is free to use and open to all. It provides a suite of services for nurses, doctors, allied health practitioners and patients and families to link them directly to the best available evidence on palliative care. This is a field in which it can be very hard to find the evidence given the multidisciplinary nature of the discipline, research that is unpublished, and relevant literature being held in a diverse range of journals and described and indexed with varied terminology.

At the heart of CareSearch is a collaborative approach in which health professionals, librarians and other information specialists work together using interdisciplinary knowledge and skills to provide a unique service. For CareSearch to succeed as a knowledge translation project, close collaboration between stakeholders including clinicians, IT professionals, graphic designers, librarians and researchers is integral to ensuring that the information provided is relevant, accessible and applicable to clinical practice.

What is a search filter?

A key tool used by CareSearch to provide better access to existing and emerging evidence is the palliative care search filter. A search filter is developed using a detailed, intensive research methodology and enables automated real-time retrieval of relevant literature. This means more consistent and comprehensive retrieval for health librarians and for clinicians, academics and researchers. The performance of the search strategy in the filter is tested and validated in a known dataset using well-accepted methodology.

The CareSearch project team developed the palliative care search filter in 2006 - one of the first subject-based filters in the world. Many existing search filters are methodology-based, for example, those designed to search for systematic reviews or randomised controlled trials. Two research studies led to the development of the Ovid Medline palliative care search filter. The results from these studies were published in two peer reviewed journals.

The research included a validation of the translation of the filter for use in PubMed enabling functional searching applications within the CareSearch website. The PubMed version of the filter has been created as a URL and embedded into links so that users with one click can search PubMed for all palliative care information, or for more than 60 assigned special topics within the field. It can also be used as a base for users to build their own customised searches, and instructions are supplied for this.

The CareSearch project team, in association with the Flinders Filters team, has developed several other search filters and various other retrieval based research projects. Current filters include: palliative care, heart failure, lung cancer, primary health care and residential aged care, with future filters to include Indigenous health and bereavement. The Flinders Filters team grew out of the CareSearch project as a result of the need to support and further this work as an area of research.

What does a search filter look like?

You might be wondering what a search filter actually looks like! Below is the palliative care search filter (see box), translated for use in Pubmed, and presented as a url. For those who are particularly interested in the technical detail (and are not faint-hearted!) you can read more about them at http://www.caresearch.com.au/caresearch/tabid/544/Default.aspx

What is the librarians’ role?

Search filter use and development are of great relevance to librarians and others in the health knowledge and evidence field. The filter work undertaken at CareSearch is one of only a small number of such projects worldwide and has a significant practical outcome for users as well as extending understanding and capacity in the area through original research and publications. It demonstrates...
the ability of librarians in the health sector, working outside the traditional library environment, to contribute valuable expertise to a growing body of research while providing a service of demonstrable value to other health practitioners, patients, carers and families.

Librarians’ high level skills in information and bibliometric analysis are not always recognized or well understood beyond the traditional library environment. This project uses the skills of the librarians to provide exemplary service as well as extend the boundaries of understanding of the processes, with broader relevance to search principles and practice generally. This project has been an opportunity for the librarians working in the team to develop their searching expertise to build an efficient and objective search to retrieve the best possible results that will be available to clinicians at the click of a button. It has showcased the skills of librarians in investigating in detail the implications of choice of search terms, delimiters and different database interrogation techniques, always with an eye to the outcome for clinical users. The involvement of and close collaboration with clinicians through the project has highlighted the expertise of the library and information professionals and given both the groups the opportunity to learn from and with each other.

A key part of the project has been the development of world-leading research expertise in the field of search filters, as well as the achievement of the important practical results. Papers have been published in key journals in both medical and library literature. Presentations have been delivered at many medical and library-related conferences. Links to many of these papers can be found on the CareSearch website at http://www.caresearch.com.au/caresearch/tabid/431/Default.aspx

Who are the CareSearch team members?

The CareSearch and Flinders Filters teams are led by Dr Jennifer Tieman, whose publications on palliative care information and research into search filter development are widely available and many can be found on the CareSearch website. Other past and present team members who have worked on search filters are: Dr Ruth Sladek, Raechel Damarell, Mikaela Lawrence and Sarah Hayman.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Hayman has worked in special, research and educational libraries for more than 30 years, as a librarian, indexer, manager and researcher. She has a strong interest in online information management and a lasting interest in online bibliographic databases and their construction. She has a passion for exploring online search mechanisms and associated quality issues.

Sarah is now working for the CareSearch palliative care knowledge network, where she feels many of the various strands of her career to date have come together. At CareSearch she is a Research Fellow (Evidence), responsible for development of search filters and the Finding Evidence section of the online service.