

Consumer Health Resource Centers in Israel 1995 - 2000/ Hassin Sarit

Abstract

Since the early 1980s, the health care environment in the United States has changed significantly. Consumer health resource centers first started appearing in hospitals in the 1970s. The first, Planetree, was founded in 1978 by a layperson, Angelica R. Thieriot. Since then, consumer health resource centers have continued to grow as hospitals and health systems increasingly recognize the importance of educating consumers about wellness, self-care, taking an active role in their medical care, and navigating the health care system. The responsibility of the consumer health resource centers and their employees to provide consumer health information is difficult and oppressive, involving insight, empathy, communication skills, and knowledge of relevant information resources.

In Israel there are six centers: Consumer Health Resource Center in Soroka Medical Center; Health Promoting and Guiding Information Center in Municipality of Jerusalem; Da'at – Health Information Service in Jerusalem; Woman Health Resource Center in Rabin Medical Center; Clalit Call Health Resource Center in Clalit Medical Services (HMO); and Health Resource Center in Ha'Emek Medical Center. All of these are recently opened centers established in the 1990s. Some of these centers are located in medical centers and are an integral part of the new service concept of these medical centers. They all share the same goal: to provide the health consumer with updated and relevant information regarding his/her illness, in order to enable him/her to take active part in the decision making regarding the treatment needed.

This goal is mainly the result of the growing need for health information and of section 13 of the Israeli Patients Bill of Rights (1996) dealing with the issue of informed consent. The trend of improving health services by establishing consumer health resource centers is taking place all over the world. This research examines this trend in Israel.

The issues dealt with in this thesis are:

- (1) Who initiated the establishment of the consumer health resource centers in Israel?
- (2) What types of activities take place in the consumer health resource centers in Israel?
- (3) Which information resources are used in order to provide the proper information to the health consumers?
- (4) Which service systems are used in order to provide the information in the consumer health resource centers in Israel?
- (5) In what kind of medical condition are the customers turning to the consumer health resource centers in Israel?
- (6) What are the main topics that interest the people turning to the consumer health resource centers in Israel?
- (7) Is there a code of behavior in these centers in Israel?
- (8) What is the professional qualification of the service providers in the consumer health resource centers in Israel?
- (9) Do the customers have to pay for the services provided by the resource centers, or are they given free of charge?
- (10) Do the hospitals or any other medical institution support these centers in Israel?
- (11) Are these centers being managed by a medical library?
- (12) Do the consumer health resource centers advertise their services to the public?

The target group contained all the employees and volunteers in the consumer health resource centers in Israel (117 people). The sample group contains 20 interviewees – employees and volunteers in the resource centers. The interview is composed of 54 questions divided into three main parts: informative details about the center; characteristics of the interviewee and leading questions. The leading questions cover six main topics: organizational attribution; the resource center's collection; the center's services; the activities that take place in the center; type of questions that are dealt with in the center, and the type of customers who turn to the resource center. The interview was uniquely designed for this research. The interview was based on previous questionnaires that appeared in two other research projects: the first was “Health information services in Ontario public libraries” by Marshall, Sowards and Dilworth (1989, 1991); and the other, “The provision of consumer health information by public librarians in Michigan”, by Baker (1997). The interviews for this research were held in the various resource centers and were conducted personally during February 2001.

All the hypotheses were verified, and it was concluded that the initiative for establishing the consumer health resource centers in Israel is not uniform and comes

mainly from the health resource centers managers, from people inside the medical system. All the centers employ mainly nurses and some librarians or information specialists. They provide health information to consumers and enable them to take active part in the treatment, and assist them to participate in the decision making process relating to their own lives as well as those of their relatives. To accomplish these goals the resource centers use various types of information resources, and mostly books and pamphlets. The health information distribution using mailed pamphlets was found to be unique in Israel. All the centers, except for the Clalit Call Health Resource Center, provide the information personally to the consumers. Most of the information provided in all the centers take place by answering questions asked on the phone and by sending packages in the mail. The amount of requests for health information is small but is constantly rising in all the centers. Quite often consumers turn to the health resource centers asking for information about a specific disease. The service is provided to all consumers, regardless of medical condition, and free of charge. None of the centers has established a code of behavior yet, but they all emphasize the quality of service and attitude towards the consumers. Most of the interviewees have a lot of professional experience (over 15 years) in roles relating to their work in the resource centers, but have very little experience in providing health information. This lack of experience is the result of the short time during which the centers exist in Israel and the fact that the information studies and librarianship schools have not yet developed a specific programs for health information providers. It is important to note that consumer health resource centers exist in the United States over 20 years and have programs for qualifying information scientists and librarians that will provide health information. In Israel these centers are only getting started and does not yet employ large and qualified personnel. Most of the resource centers in Israel are supported by medical centers and mainly funds and contributions. All around the world medical centers are aware of the importance of having a health resource center within the organization and they provide funding for establishing the resource centers and for maintaining them. Clalit Call Health Resource Center is the only one funded by the organization to which it belongs without the need for donations. Only the health resource center of Ha'Emek Medical Center is physically located inside a medical library, managed by it and combines its collection in this of the library. However the resource center is still located in a different hall inside the library. Two other resource centers are located inside medical centers. All the centers

advertise their services however not all of them advertise to the public. Only Clalit Call advertise on television.

This research leads the way for further research in order to examine: health information needs in Israel; analysis of consumer satisfaction using health resource centers; the role of public libraries in providing health information. This new research reveals for the first time the important issue of helth consumerism research in Israel.

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