

Training U.K. Librarians to Use the Cochrane Library: has this impacted on use of the resource?

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A. BACKGROUND

In the UK, local healthcare libraries are an important source of access to medical databases for all healthcare professionals. Guidance on their application and use is usually sought from library staff, or in some cases librarians are responsible for carrying out mediated searches on behalf of users. After assessing training needs, the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD) started a training programme for librarians and other information staff during 1998. The aim of the programme was to improve use and increase understanding of the Cochrane Library. To complement this, support materials were developed and disseminated via the web. We used before and after questionnaires to assess the impact of this training on librarians' perceptions of use of the Cochrane Library and training activities.

B. METHODS

415 librarians were trained during 1998. At the beginning of each session, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire asking about current use of the Cochrane Library and other related questions. 229 (55%) agreed to fill in a follow-up questionnaire, which was posted/e-mailed to them in June 1999.

The response rate for the follow-up questionnaire was 75% (171 replies), 24 of which were returned by colleagues for recipients on sick leave, in new roles or who had left. The final analysis was therefore carried out on the before and after questionnaires of 147 respondents.

C. RESULTS

Usage of the Cochrane Library has increased since the original questionnaires were completed (see figure 1). Respondents were asked to rate usage (e.g. 1=never, 5=daily) and the average scores for the before and after responses were 2.49 and 2.94 respectively. These were tested with a paired t-test and the difference was found to be significant ($t = -4.45$, $p = 0.000$). Figure 1 shows the results for reported usage of the Cochrane Library.

Respondents were asked to rate how easy or hard they felt the Cochrane Library was to use (1=very easy, 5=very hard). Again, testing the average score with a paired t-test, the difference between the two was significant (3.24 for first questionnaire, 2.76 for the follow-up, $t = 5.34$, $p = 0.000$). 17% graded the Cochrane Library easy or very easy to use with the first questionnaire; this increased to 39% in the follow-up. Hard or very hard gradings reduced from 35% to 23%. (see figure 2)

Librarians were also asked about their training of users of the Cochrane Library. Training activities increased significantly, (see figure 3). Before training 62% of respondents reported training others in the use of the Cochrane Library in either group or one-to-one sessions. After attending CRD training, this increased to 91.8%.

The support materials available on the web seem to be an important resource in supporting Cochrane Library use in U.K. libraries. Of the 76% aware of the materials, 38% used them for training users and 42% used them as instructional guides in the library. The 37% of respondents who were aware of the resources but who did not use them, seems to indicate that there is scope for further development of these materials in the future.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Usage of the Cochrane Library in UK health libraries has increased in the period between librarians receiving training and the follow-up questionnaires being completed. From this survey there is no direct evidence that this change has occurred solely as a result of the training conducted by CRD, as we have no data from librarians who have not attended a CRD session. However, the results would seem to indicate that the training programme has had some impact on use of the Cochrane Library in UK health care libraries, and that similar programmes might be worth repeating in other settings/countries.

Support materials provided by CRD on the web are heavily used for user and professional education. Development of these materials should be continued and expanded to meet the needs of those not using the materials at present.

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FIGURE 1

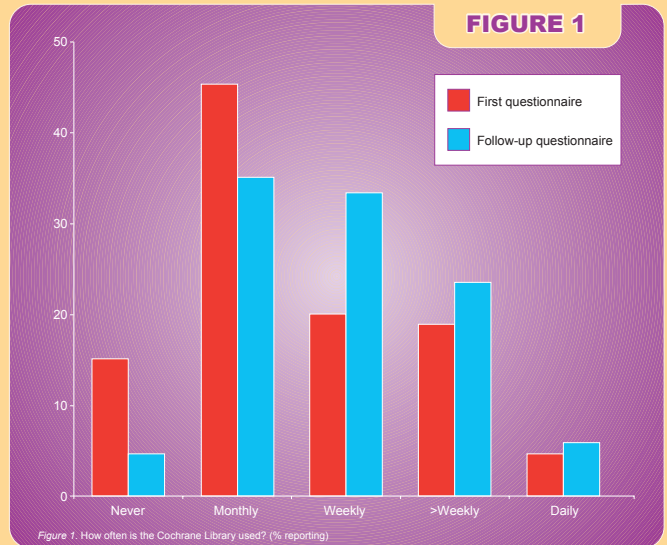


Figure 1. How often is the Cochrane Library used? (% reporting)

FIGURE 2

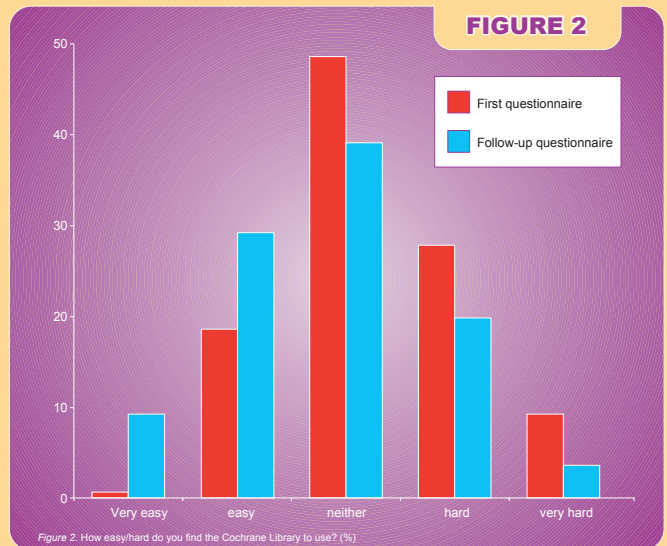


Figure 2. How easy/hard do you find the Cochrane Library to use? (%)

FIGURE 3

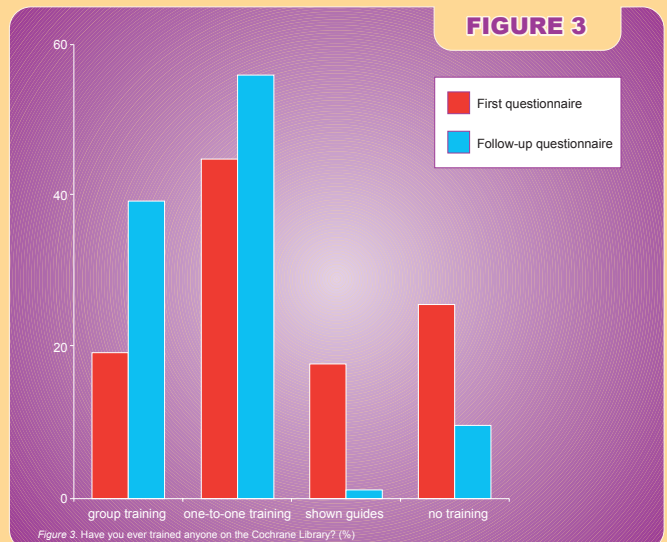


Figure 3. Have you ever trained anyone on the Cochrane Library? (%)