

C³+C³: challenges, compromises and considerations. 50 years of veterinary librarianship

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The senior representatives of veterinary librarianship belong to the generation of librarians whose "dreams have come true": millions of bibliographic and other data have become easily searchable in electronic databases, and readily available through the internet. Developments that seemed very futuristic in our college years. However, these developments seem to run over libraries and librarians. Vital changes are unavoidable.

It was almost 50 years ago, that the first graduate librarian was appointed head of the library of the University of Veterinary Medicine. From that time on the development of the collection, facilities, and services followed professional standards and international trends. The milestones of half the century included a lot of cooperation, the establishment of a wide variety of connections, and the creation of new services. These will be presented on the poster with an eye to the future.

The questions to be answered are: which are the elements of the services that should be maintained? How should the network of connections be reshaped for survival? How should the attitudes of librarians and cooperation models be changed to ensure tailored services to the academic and veterinary community on the one hand, and the prosperity of the veterinary library on the other?

C³+C³: challenges, compromises and considerations

50 years of veterinary librarianship (from a Hungarian perspective)

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After the World War II the history of libraries in Hungary were characterised by adverse trends. There was a general lack of resources first, followed by a trend of centralisation and to some extent the copying of the Soviet model in this field, too. As a matter of fact relations to the west were limited. It was difficult to get hold of foreign journals and books, not to speak about international relations and visits to conferences or institutions behind the "iron curtain". However, the veterinary school of Budapest was an exception to some extent, boasting of several internationally acknowledged professors (like Marek or Kotlán) who had established relationships abroad. Their connections enhanced international exchange, and they did not hesitate to ask for an increased budget if the acquisition of foreign journals and books were threatened. They also had an idea of what to expect from a library, had needs to be fulfilled, thus the veterinary school provided the necessary resources most of the time.

Looking at the history of the library of the Budapest veterinary school on the one hand, and taking a quick overview of articles published in the last half a century by animal health information institutions all over the world, or the presentations of the ICAHIS conferences, we see that in spite of the political isolation and the economic constraints encountered, our library has always been fairly up-to-date. This was due to a great extent to the professionalism of the management which laid emphasis on following international trends, and has convinced the university leadership to provide the necessary resources, or made efforts to raise funds from applications and supporters.

The first graduate librarian (wife of a then young lecturer) started to work for the library in 1961. Later on more library professionals were employed, but it was not until 1979 that the first graduate librarian was appointed as head of the veterinary library, motivated on the one hand by the library profession "coming of age", and the increasing level of veterinary training and information

needs generated by it on the other. This was a prerequisite of the realisation of the modernisation plans outlined by that time. By the middle of the 1980s more and more professional services (such as training of first year students, compilation of a kind of reference journal, manually provided SDI and current awareness, the idea of computerised cataloguing, etc.) were introduced.

This decade was a period of intensive reorganisation and modernisation at the library. It had started with the planning of the library's new facilities, which were opened in 1983.

In the early 1980s the prices of journals increased so much that coordination between institutions and the establishment of a reliable union catalogue, on which interlending could be based, were inevitable. From this time on the veterinary school's library took responsibility for the provision of the Hungarian library community with veterinary and animal health journal articles. However, due to the declining economical background, the number of subscriptions had to be cut considerably by 1987. Still the core journals of the profession could be provided. At this time there were difficulties related to the acquisition of books as well, though the library got the right to select books from among the legal deposit copies. In 1988 German-language training started and as a background to it, many German (text)books had been purchased.

The first connection to DiaLog and Datastar via telephone lines was established in 1981, and searches well-prepared in offline mode were run in Agris, VETDOC, ASCA, AGIT/CAB.

A local terminal for online searching was introduced in 1987, and by that time CAB, Agricola, Biosis, Chemical Abstracts, Medline were available. Though there were dozens of profiles used, reference work relied heavily on searching manually in the indexing and abstracting journals, not to speak about citation analysis which was done completely manually for some more years.

Students have become more the focus of library services: a reading room with librarians, longer opening hours, and increasing attention to user education marked this. It was also inevitable since the writing of a graduation thesis was introduced at the end of the 1970s, requiring intensive work in the library. The training of students became a part of the curriculum in the first and 3rd or 4th years. It has also become part of the continuing education courses held for veterinarians.

It was also in the middle of the decade that the library stopped to use UDC for indexing, and introduced a thesaurus developed especially for its subject catalogue. This was later translated into English, and uploaded to the integrated library system (Tinlib).

Related to the 200th anniversary of veterinary training in Hungary (1987) the museum and the university archives were attached to the library, and an old book collection was established of items selected from the collection.

The next decade (1990–2000) saw the transition from paper to electronic. Computerised cataloguing started in 1990, CD-ROM databases were purchased and could be searched via a local

area network. A few years later the catalogue (as well as the Hungarian Veterinary Bibliography) went online (the card catalogue was closed down), and a website was created for the library.

This was the decade not only of the breakthrough of computer technology, but also that of opening the library in many ways.

First of all the political changes of 1989 have created a new opportunity for integration in the international professional community. The library director participated at the ICAHIS conferences in 1992, 1997, 2000 and invited the 4th to Budapest (2003). Several of us have joined Vetlib-L (no need to detail the advantages it brings), and had the opportunity to visit veterinary libraries in the framework of bilateral agreements, Erasmus exchange programmes, EAHIL conferences, etc. It had all meant a lot in the development of the library, and we are very grateful for the constant and reliable help of this community.

Using the internet, especially towards the year 2000, gave an impetus to services provided for the veterinary profession. A newsletter was started in 1996 and published in the journal of the Hungarian Veterinary Chamber. Later it has been made available on the library homepage as well.

User education developed further, and the first textbook was issued both in print and electronically. An English language study programme was started, which meant that the library had to turn bilingual.

High level of information services were needed, while the library had to face permanent economic constraints. A novel management approach had to be introduced: applications and fundraising were skills to be learnt. This approach was fully fledged at the beginning of the 21st century when for 10 years the veterinary library was acting as the administrator of the so-called “agricultural consortium” created for the more economic and efficient acquisition of databases (e.g. CAB Abstracts, FSTA, Zoological Record) required by agricultural libraries. Applying for funds, coordinating orders and participants, negotiating with vendors, monitoring and supervising the operation of services, etc. was not an easy task for a relatively small library. However, by the end of the first decade, the national level “electronic information service” took over gradually – a solution that had long been urged by libraries.

Many academic institutions – among them the veterinary university – were integrated into larger units, in our case a monstrous “agricultural” university with faculties for architecture, teachers’ training, health, and economy, besides the veterinary, horticulture and agricultural ones. This integration reduced the autonomy of libraries, and some were actually physically integrated into larger ones. Luckily this was not the case for us.

This was also the time of introducing quality assurance to libraries. As a matter of fact, there had been user surveys before, since the library has always been user focused, and wanted to know more about the information habits of the different categories of readers. Thus this decade had

brought TQM, strategic planning, and becoming a “learning organisation”. Later the library became also ISO accredited.

Maybe these were the best years for reference work. The many quality databases and resources available with subscription and only at the library attracted users. Of course, an increasing portion of these resources were electronic. There were years, in which librarians answered more than one reference questions a day, some of which required several days’ work. It was also a period when user education flourished since erudite searching techniques were required for the effective use of information sources.

The assessment (accreditation) of both the institution and the academic and research staff had become more important. Enhanced by the stable access to Web of Science and later Scopus, scientometric data were a prerequisite of promotions as well as applications. The library also started to elaborate five-year analyses of the scientific publications of the university. By the end of this decade special databases were used for the registration and analysis of this output at a national level. MTMT (the database of Hungarian scientific publications) is a national service provided by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which is a great enhancement, and quite a bit of a job for the librarians, but a very good tool for the researchers, and the institutions engaged in research.

The electronic “boom” rapidly washed away the traditional approach to librarianship, in fact too rapidly to develop a powerful strategy, and – more important – change the attitudes of senior librarians.

Users tend to be satisfied with what they can find on the internet, and are full of misbeliefs concerning the completeness and reliability of this information. User education does not seem to be important any more with the highly developed artificial intelligence (AI) behind search engines and translator programs. The library is not much more than a place to study or borrow a book, since authorized users have access to resources at their homes, offices or on mobile phones. The learning patterns of X, Y, Z generation users is very different: a visually focused, non-linear approach to information is reflected in books, and determine the number and length of visits paid to a website.

Even though we tried to attract a new section of potential readers, pet owners coming to the clinic, we have to admit that this section serves more as a collection of relaxing reading matter for students getting tired of learning. Similarly, the collection of relevant websites (on netvibes), or the restructuring of services for different user groups and presenting them on the web turned out to be rather ineffective.

Helping academic staff uploading their bibliographic data to MTMT, convincing them of the potentials and importance of institutional (and academic) repositories, introducing the idea of open access and discussing pros and cons are some of the major issues we have to cope with.

The support of researchers, not only in the assessment of their output, or supporting the visibility of their achievements, but also by providing them with non-bibliographic data is a field in which there is still a long way to go.

Librarians have always been good at being one step ahead of user needs. However, there are trends which librarians see as important, but which cannot be embraced without the fairly thorough change of the curriculum, or of the information use habits of clinicians, and practitioners.

Evidence Based Veterinary Medicine does not seem to be established in Hungary yet. Considering the cost and effort required for the preparation of – say – a systematic review, it is no wonder. But clinical practice should be based on evidence as far as possible, thus there should be material available in Hungarian about the topic, and students should be prepared for the application of EBVM, and also for critical appraisal of literature and information as such.

Problem-based learning is also something painfully missing from our curriculum. Without the need for using literature for solving problems we cannot hope for preparing students for using it during their career and staying life-long learners.

And finally One Health is also a concept often mentioned, but not really reflected in the library. The interdisciplinary approach required to any more serious work in this field would also demand the special skills of librarians.

It is time to face what is going on and open the space for the young generation of information specialists who have the background and courage to take a radically different approach to service provision and libraries. In their view academic and research staff will need less help in searching and document delivery, but more in relation to publishing, scientometrics, and there will be special needs formulated in the field of acquisition as well.

The management of the veterinary school has similar requirements but on an institutional level: information for decision making and strategic planning regarding the scientific output of the institution (analyses, advice, assessments, etc.), publishing strategies, different rankings, etc.

Students are the most sensitive to changes, thus their needs are changing more rapidly. Those with academic or scientific aspirations tend to build their career more consciously with more specific goals. Special colleges and university mentor programmes offer a great possibility for them to head for these goals. The library may contribute greatly to the development of these outstanding and ambitious students, thus increasing its own value in training, especially in problem based learning.

Students are also more susceptible for technological solutions and are more easily accommodating to a practically “self-service” library. While happy with this, students have special needs for social life and networking, and keeping in touch both with their peers, and with the teaching staff among others. The library as a study is an ideal space for this. They look for “social”

services, like leisure readings, group rooms, lunch facilities, long opening hours, furniture for sleeping, etc.

The relation to veterinarians is also promising, but less predictable. The dichotomy of copyrighted and open access materials creates a tension not easy to solve, and may even create a barrier between the library and the practitioners.

Artificial intelligence, and other technological solutions take over much of the burden of librarians. Sometimes we feel, they take over the librarian's role completely. New skills and competences are given priority in the training of library and information specialists. What these should be is a complex issue. Assisting research as partners with professional searching, handling of research data, analyses, preparation of systematic reviews, participation in the spread of EBVM, etc. is certainly one track. Helping users to keep critical thinking alive, to understand AI systems with their capacities and limitations is another one.

As a matter of fact, libraries will also be required to maintain and develop historic collections and archives, and organise related events.

Finally marketing is important in the magnitude of services and information users are overwhelmed with. Even good wine (service) needs bush.

To sum up: personal communication, quality work, artificial intelligence and marketing will be the signposts of the future.

Suggested literature:

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