To review the literature in the Health Sciences disciplines relating to information seeking behavior.

Methods

I started with an exploratory search in PubMed for the MeSH heading "Information Seeking Behavior". Based on results, I opted to narrow the scope to:

- Studies published 2010 or later
- Population studied is predominantly from the United States
- Studied population included health care professionals and pre-professional students
- Detailed use of information resources in a health care setting, not including patient information

It was difficult to formulate a search string on the specific topic, so searches were conducted for "information seeking behavior", "information behavior" and "(online or Internet) use" and the specific subject term in the following databases PubMed, CINAHL, Web of Science, Scopus, and LISTA. Citation chaining of applicable articles’ references was utilized to fill in possible gaps.

Nearly 1200 articles were examined by title, narrowing the number to 286 articles. Reading abstracts further narrowed the articles to 76, of which 25 were found to be applicable to this study.

Articles were eliminated from consideration for various reasons, most commonly because they dealt with non-library resources, patient specific information seeking, international in scope, or dealing with information needs.

Results

The 25 identified articles were read and analyzed based on various attributes, including:

- Status of author(s)/researcher(s)
- Population(s) studied
- Method(s) utilized
- Results

The majority of the studies had at least one author who was a librarian, mostly in a health sciences library. Medical faculty are also likely to conduct information seeking research. The research focused on physicians (various specialties), faculty, and other health clinicians. Nurses and student populations are the least studied.

The majority of the studies used a survey method, which gave general self-reported data on what resources a population used or the types questions they sought to answer. A handful of studies dealt with library or instruction assessment. There were only 3 studies that examined how individuals searched for information in detail. Two studies used more than one method. Only 4 studies utilized qualitative data.

Conclusions

Information seeking research is an emerging research area in the health sciences. Understanding how our users conduct research can help librarians tailor services and resources, as well as prepare students for future information needs.

More research should be done about students, so librarians can provide targeted instruction and services while they are still in school.

Future research should focus on ethnographic/qualitative studies to obtain richer data that is not self-reported.