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# INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS: A CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

*Focuses on the analytical study of information-seeking behavior among Medical Practitioners of Varanasi district. Their preferences regarding various formats of information sources (formal, informal and electronic information sources) have been explored through quantitative survey. Identified that awareness of resources, surroundings environment, medical practitioners participations, ability to use tool, self evaluation, intuition are having positive impact on medical practitioners information needs and seeking behavior.*

**KEYWORDS:** Information Seeking Behaviour, Information Sources, Medical Practitioners, Databases, Web-OPAC

## Introduction

Up to some years back, there was no problem in identifying the information sources in libraries as the majority of them were in only printed form such as books, periodicals, Govt. publication, dissertations and thesis, patents, standards, specification etc. The emergence of the internet particularly the WWW as a new medium represents a revolution in information storage and retrieval. It has shown a paradigm shift in information render and information seeking behaviour of the regular users.

A user's information needs often depends upon the purpose for which he is seeking information. According to Tom Wilson (1995), "information seeking behaviour result from the recognition of some need perceived by the user." The behavior may

take several forms such as user psychology, working condition availability of information resources etc.

### **Information Seeking Behaviour in Digital Environment**

In the online environment it has been observed that one can follow three general types of seeking methods:

1. **Direct Browsing:** It is defined as focused and systematic browsing on special object or target. Its online phenomenon includes targeted lists scanning and information verification.
2. **Semi-directed Browsing:** It is defined as predictive and general purposeful browsing which is less definitive and systematic. Its on-line phenomenon includes generic term searching and reading information from retrieved lists in an unsystemic manner.
3. **In-Directed Browsing:** It is as focused on and scattered browsing. Its online phenomenon includes predefined and channeled surfing.

### **Significance of the Study**

In the present era of information explosion, more and information are available on web. All the sources of information are now available on electronic media like online and other stored electronic formats. The old traditional methods and models of information seeking are needed to be redefined in new context i.e. in digital age. Medical as a profession is one of the most dynamic fields where new medicines and investigations keep coming daily. One needs to keep pace with the changing scenario of medical profession as an active Medical Professional. Another major problem with medical professional is that they have less time for self study therefore they need to have a system which can update them on job without disturbing their routine. In such a scenario the proposed study aims to quickly define medical professional's needs and rendering the significant services to them.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as under

1. To examine the frequency of visit to library by medical practitioners and services offered by the libraries.
2. To examine the use of formal and informal sources of information by medical practitioners of Varanasi district.

3. To examine the use frequency of internet by medical practitioners.
4. To examine the use frequency of drug information databases available on the web.
5. To examine the participation in the seminar/conference and publication activities of medical practitioners of Varanasi district.

### **Scope, Coverage and Methodology of the Study**

The study is based on the sample of medical practitioners drawn from a population of doctors working in private hospitals, government hospitals and medical colleges of Varanasi district. Since this study was designed to investigate the use of information sources by the medical practitioners working in the government hospital, private hospital and government medical colleges of Varanasi district, the use of the survey method was considered suitable. Indeed survey method is a device for collecting data or factual information on certain decided characteristics or items of a universe of population. The present study relied upon the survey method to provide descriptive data concerning the use of various sources of information in Medical Sciences.

### **Review of Literature**

Fourie in 2009 studied the information behaviour of healthcare professionals. The result regarding emotion in information behaviour in health care context was scantily addressed expressing information needs; sense making and the need to fill knowledge gap; uncertainty; personality and coping skills; motivation for seeking information; emotional experience during information seeking; self confidence and attitude; emotional factor in the selection of information channels. Jamali, Hamid R & Nicholas David (2008) studied the information seeking behaviour of physicist and astronomer. The study aimed to examine two aspects of information seeking behaviour of physicist and astronomers including methods for keeping up to date and method used for finding related subject articles. Fourie Ina (2007) studied on exploration of the potential of www current awareness service for Oncology nurses. This study made new opportunities for library and information professionals to offer CAS in the health and other professional sectors by reconsidering how one can use CAS available via the www.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data collected through the questionnaire was used for final analysis. The data

obtained through the questionnaire was coded and data was analyzed with the help of SPSS and MS-Excel. The analysis was done by a one-way analysis of variance considering the difference by roles as the independent variables. The data was conspicuously represented through a number of charts and diagrams.

**Table 1 : Total Number of Medical Practitioners**

Total distributed questionnaire		Returned questionnaire by respondent for analysis				Not returned questionnaire	
Number	Percentage	Number		Percentage		Number	Percentage
550	100	365		66.36		185	33.63
		Questionnaire used for data analysis		Discarded questionnaire			
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		
		295	80.82	70	19.17		

In overall 550 (five hundred fifty) questionnaire was distributed among medical practitioners of Varanasi district, 365(three hundred sixty five) answered the questionnaire making the response rate 66.36%; only 295 (80.82%) were used for data analysis, whereas 70 (19.17%) questionnaire were discarded because they were partially filled up and thus were incomplete. Details of distributed questionnaire and questionnaire used for data analysis by Medical practitioners of Varanasi district is given in the above table.

### General Characteristics of the Medical Practitioners

In overall, 295 questionnaire was used for the purpose of statistical analysis. The data given in Table 2 indicates that out of 295 medical practitioners, 156(52.88%) were involved in private practice only; 74 (25.08%) government practice only; 23 (7.79%) practice with teaching; 34 (11.52%) practice with administration and 8 (2.71%) are involved in practice with teaching and administration.

**Table 2 : Medical Practitioners Activities**

Respondent Involved	Number	Percentage
Private practice only	156	52.88
Govt. practice only	74	25.08
Practice with teaching	23	7.79
Practice with administration	34	11.52
Practice with teaching & administration	08	2.71

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With regard to the medical practitioners visit to library, it was found that out of 295 respondents; 141 (47.79%) medical practitioners visit libraries; whereas 154 (52.20%) do not visit the library.

**Table 3: Frequency of Visit to Library by the Medical Practitioners**

Frequency of Visit	Number	Percentage
Daily	Nil	Nil
Once in a Week	21	14.89
Once in a Month	32	22.69
Occasionally	88	62.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100%</b>

Answer regarding the frequency of visit to library out of 141 respondents revealed that they did not visit the library daily; once in a week 21 (14.89%); once in a month 32 (10.85%) whereas occasionally were 88 (29.83%) medical practitioner of Varanasi district visit to library.

Answer regarding the type of service used in library by medical practitioners of Varanasi district, Table 4, shows that current awareness service was used by 82 (58.15%) practitioners; Selective dissemination of information was used by 28 (19.85%) practitioners; Inter library loan was used by 09 (6.38%) practitioners; Reference service was used by 102 (72.39%) practitioners; Internet service was used by 48 (34.04 %) practitioners; Circulation/lending service was used by 37(26.24%) medical practitioners; Abstracting/indexing services was used by 72 (51.06%) practitioners; Bibliographic service was used by 46 (32.62%) practitioners; Translation Service was used by 12 (4.06%) medical practitioners; whereas reprographic service was used by 118 (83.68%) medical practitioner of Varanasi district.

**Table 4 : Type of Library Services Uses by Medical Practitioners**

<b>Services in Library</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Current Awareness Service	82	58.15
Selective Dissemination of Information Service	28	19.85
Inter Library loan Service	09	6.38
Reference Service	102	72.39
Internet Service	48	34.04
Circulation/Lending Services	37	26.24
Abstracting/Indexing Service	72	51.06
Bibliographies Service	46	32.62
Translation Service	12	4.06
Reprographic Service	118	83.68

Analysis regarding the information service available in the library, Table 5 shows that 86 (60.99%) practitioners stated that information service available in library was Adequate, (24.11%) practitioners stated that was inadequate; whereas (14.89%) medical practitioners stated that there is need for tremendous improvement in information service available in the library. It implies that the Medical Practitioners are not very much satisfied with the services of the library consulted by them.

**Table 5 : Opinion on Information Service Available in the Library**

<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Adequate	86	60.99
Inadequate	34	24.11
Needs tremendous Improvement?	21	14.89
<b>Total</b>	141	100%

### Formal Sources of Information Used by the Medical Practitioners

The formal and informal sources of information refer to all facilities and channels or transmission media through which medical practitioners can obtain information. With regard to the use of formal sources of information by medical practitioners of Varanasi district, Table 6 presents the relevant data.

**Table 6 : Formal Sources of Information Used by  
Medical Practitioners**

Formal Sources	Generally	Percentage	Rarely	Percentage	Never	Percentage
Journal	132	44.74	84	28.47	79	26.77
Monographs/Textbook	02	0.67	89	30.16	204	69.15
Personal Information	05	1.69	71	24.06	219	74.23
Abstracts and Indexes	48	16.27	89	30.16	158	53.55
Bibliographies	22	7.45	51	17.28	222	75.25
Publisher Catalogues	09	3.05	49	16.61	237	80.33
Library Catalogues	63	21.35	78	26.44	154	52.20
Research Report	115	38.98	48	16.27	132	44.74
Thesis/Dissertation	34	11.52	69	23.38	192	65.08
Govt. Publications	72	29.90	88	29.83	135	45.76

The analysis of data reveals that the medical practitioners of Varanasi district, 132 (44.74%) practitioners generally used journal; 84 (28.47%) practitioners rarely used journals, whereas 79 (26.77%) of the medical practitioners never used journals for getting the information. Monographs and textbook was generally used by only 02 (0.67%) medical practitioners; rarely used by 89 (30.16%) practitioners and 204 (69.15%) medical practitioners of Varanasi district never used monographs and textbook for search of the information. Personal information files was generally used by only 05 (1.69%) medical practitioners; and rarely used by 71 (24.06%) medical practitioners, whereas 219 (74.23%) of the medical practitioners of Varanasi district never used personal information files.

Abstracts and indexes were generally used by 48 (16.27%) medical practitioners; and rarely used by 89 (30.16%) practitioners, whereas 158 (53.55%) of the medical practitioners of Varanasi district never used abstracts and indexes for satisfying their information needs. Bibliographies were generally used by 22 (7.45%) medical practitioners; and rarely used by 51 (17.28%) practitioners, whereas 222 (75.25%) of the medical practitioners never used bibliographies. Publisher's catalogue was

generally used by only 09 (3.05%) medical practitioners and rarely used by 49 (16.61%) practitioners, whereas 237 (80.33%) of the medical practitioners never used publishers' catalogue.

Research report was generally used by 115 (38.98%) medical practitioners; and rarely used by 48 (16.27%) practitioners, whereas 132 (44.74%) of the medical practitioners never used research reports. Thesis/Dissertation was generally used by 34 (11.52%) medical practitioners; and rarely used by 69 (23.38%) practitioners; whereas 192 (65.08%) of the medical practitioners of Varanasi district never used thesis/ dissertation. Government publications generally used by 72 (29.90%) medical practitioners; and rarely used by 88 (29.83%) practitioners; whereas 135 (45.76%) of the medical practitioners never used government publications.

### Informal Sources Used by Medical Practitioners

The informal sources are described as encompassing the procedure which the scientists use to develop his raw information into a finished product worthy of being submitted to the editorial review of a scientific journal publication. Table 7 given below contains the computed data with regard to the use of informal sources of information by the Medical practitioners of Varanasi district.

**Table 7 : Informal Sources of Information Used by Medical Practitioners**

Informal Sources	Generally	Percentage	Rarely	Percentage	Never	Percentage
Personal contact with colleagues	138	46.77	93	31.52	64	21.69
Seminar, Workshops, Conferences	227	76.94	59	20	09	3.05
Consulting a Reference Librarian	103	34.91	38	12.88	154	52.26
Exhibition, Concerts, Performance	09	3.05	016	5.42	270	91.25

The medical practitioners of Varanasi district, who had generally “personal contact with colleagues” for seeking information were 138(46.77%) and this methods was

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rarely used by 93(31.52%) practitioners; whereas 64 (21.69%) of the medical practitioners did not maintain personal contact with their colleagues for seeking information.

The medical practitioners of Varanasi District, who generally resorted to attending seminar, workshops, conferences were 227 (76.94%) ; and rarely attended 59 (20%) of the practitioners, whereas 09(3.05%) of the medical practitioners never attended seminar, workshops, conferences for seeking information. As regards consultation with reference librarians, it was found that 103 (34.91%) of the medical practitioners generally consulted reference librarians for information. While 38(12.88%) rarely consulted reference librarians and 154 (52.26%) of the medical practitioners never consulted reference librarians for information.

As regards going to exhibition, participation in concerts, performance, it was found that 09(3.05%) of the medical practitioners generally consulted such information channels; and 16 (5.42%) of the medical practitioners rarely used, whereas 270(91.25%) of the medical practitioners never used such type of information sources for information.

### Frequency and Purpose of Using Internet by Medical Practitioners

Internet is a vast resource of information to the users. It has world's largest resources on all varieties of information that could be visualized by human mind. The resource of internet covers all the categories of sources of information in a different manner due to overlapping in the scope and coverage among the different electronic documents. The data regarding use of Internet by medical practitioners of Varanasi district is given below in Table 8.

**Table 8 : Use of Internet by Medical Practitioners**

Yes			No		
<b>233</b>			<b>62</b>		
<b>78.98%</b>			<b>21.01%</b>		
<b>If yes, then give frequency of using internet</b>			<b>If no, then give the one strongest reason for not using the internet</b>		
Frequency	Number	Percentage	Reason	Number	Percentage
Daily	72	30.90	I am unsure what it is	NIL	NIL
Weekly	128	54.93	I prefer to use manual sources	18	29.03
Monthly	21	9.01	Lack of time	35	56.45
Several time in a year	12	5.15	Lack of easy access	07	11.29
			Lack of training/help	02	3.22

With regards to the use of internet by medical practitioners, the data analysis revealed that 233 (78.98%) of the medical practitioners use internet whereas 62(21.01%) did not use internet. Regarding the frequency of use of internet by medical practitioners, it was found that 72 (30.90%) practitioners stated that they used internet daily, 128 (54.93 %) practitioners stated that they used it on weekly basis; 21 (9.01%) practitioners mentioned that they use it on monthly basis, whereas 12 (5.15%) practitioners stated that they used internet several times in a year.

The analysis of the reason for not using the internet by medical practitioners, it was found that 18 (29.03% ) practitioners stated that they preferred to use manual sources; 35 (56.45 %) practitioners indicated that they did not have time for using internet for seeking information; while 07 ( 11.29%) practitioners mentioned that they did not find it easy to access internet; but 02 (3.22% ) practitioners indicated that they did not use internet because of lack of formal training.

**Table 9 : Purpose of Medical Practitioners for Using the Internet**

Purpose	Number	Percentage
Obtaining Instructional Materials	83	35.62
Professional Interest	118	50.64
Research	17	7.29
Continuing Education	48	20.60
Publishing	22	9.44
Any other	8	3.43

Analysis was made to examine the purpose of using Internet by the medical practitioner. The data analysis of Table 9 reveals that 35.62% of the medical practitioners stated that they use internet for obtaining instructional materials; 50.64% of the medical practitioners mention that they use it because of their professional interest; 7.29% of medical practitioners stated that they use it because of their interest in research in their subject field. Further it was found that 20.60% of the medical practitioners stated that they used internet for continuing education.

### Purpose of Using Open Access Journals by Medical Practitioners

Open access journal are scholarly journal that are available online to the user without financial, legal or technical barrier. There are some Open Access Journals mostly used by medical practitioners e.g. Free Medical Journals.com, BioMed Control, PubMed Central, MEDLARS Databases, Bioline International, Priory Medical Journals, OpenMed, HealthBook, FreeBooks, Doctors.com etc. The Table 10 given below shows the frequency and purpose of using open access journals by medical practitioners.

**Table 10 : Use of Open Access Journals**

Yes			No		
105			190		
35.59%			64.40%		
If yes, then please give the frequency of using open access journals.			If no, then please give the one strongest reason for not using the open access journals.		
Frequency	Number	Percentage	Reason	Number	Percentage
Daily	11	10.47	I am unsure what it is	18	4.47%
Weekly	58	55.23	I prefer to use manual sources	46	24.21%
Monthly	23	21.90	Lack of time	78	41.05
Several time in a year	13	12.38	Lack of easy access	17	8.44
			Lack of training/help	31	16.31

Regarding use of open access journals available on the web by medical practitioners of Varanasi district, the Table 10 shows that 105 (35.59%) of the medical practitioners answered affirmative, whereas 190 (64.40%) did not use open access journals available on the web. The analysis of the frequency of using open access journals by medical practitioners reveals that 10.47% of the practitioners used it daily; 55.23% practitioners use it on weekly basis; 21.90% practitioners used it on monthly basis whereas 12.38% of the medical practitioners stated that they use it several time in a year.

Analysis of the reasons for not using the open access journals, among 190 medical practitioners, 4.47% stated that they were not sure as to what it is; further 24.21% practitioners stated that they preferred to use manual sources; further 41.05%

practitioners stated that they have no time for using it; further 8.44% of the practitioners mentioned that accessing open access journals was not easy; and further 16.31% stated that they did not have formal training which is essential for proper access to open access journals.

**Table 11: Purpose of Using Open Access Journals**

Purpose	Number	Percentage
Obtaining list of article/paper	42	40
Rema in current on the subject	61	58.09
Research	21	20
Continuing education	47	44.76
Publishing	15	14.28
Any other	Nil	Nil

Answer regarding the purpose of using open access journal available on the web, 40% of the medical practitioners stated that they used open access journals for obtaining list of article /paper on the subject of their choice. While 58.09% of the practitioners used it for remaining current in the field, while 20% practitioners used it for research purpose, further it was found that 44.76% of the practitioners used it for continuing their self education; and further it was found that 14.28% practitioners used open access journals for publishing article/paper in their of interest field.

### **Frequency and Purpose of Using Drug Information Databases Available on the Web**

Drug information databases include information on thousands of presentation and over the counter medication including potential side effect and interaction with food and other drugs. There are some very important databases related to medical field e.g. Iowa Drug Information service MICRODEX Healthcare Service, Medline plus, Medicines Complete etc. The Table 12 given below shows the frequency and purpose of using drug information database available on web.

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**Table 12 : Use of Drug Information Databases Available on Web**

Yes			No		
<b>68</b>			<b>227</b>		
<b>23.05%</b>			<b>76.94</b>		
If yes, please give the frequency of using drug information data databases available on the web.			If no, then please give the one strong reason for not using the drug information databases available on the web.		
Frequency	Number	Percentage	Reason	Number	Percentage
Daily	04	5.88	I am unsure what it is	22	9.69
Weekly	38	55.88	I prefer to use manual sources	76	33.48
Monthly	15	22.05	Lack of time	91	40.08
Several times in a year	11	16.17	Lack of easy access	10	4.40
			Lack of training/help	28	12.33

In terms of using drug information databases available on the web, among 295 medical practitioners 68(23.05%) medical practitioners replied in the positive answer, it means they use drug information databases, whereas 227 (76.94%) gave the answer in negative. The frequency of using drug information databases available on the web were daily used by 5.88% practitioners; weekly used by 55.88% practitioners; monthly used by 22.05% practitioners and several time in a year used by 16.17% medical practitioners.

Regarding the reason for not using any drug information databases available on web, among 227 medical practitioners, 9.69% stated that they were unsure what it is; 33.48% practitioners stated that they preferred to use manual sources; further 40.08% practitioners stated that lack of time for using the drug information databases; 4.40% practitioners stated that lack of easy access; whereas 12.33% medical practitioners stated lack of formal training for not using drug information databases available on the web.

The analysis of data regarding the purpose of using drug information databases available on the web by medical practitioners, it was seen that 41.17% of the practitioners use for obtaining instructional materials; while 72.05% of the practitioners use it due to professional interest; 16.17% use it for research purpose; 26.47% of the practitioners used it for continuing education; further it was found that 04(5.88%) practitioners stated that they use it for many other purposes.

**Table 13: Purpose of Using Drug Information Databases**

Purpose	Number	Percentage
Obtaining instructional materials	28	41.17
Professional interest	49	72.05
Research	11	16.17
Continuing education	18	26.47
Any other	04	5.88

### Participation in the Seminar/Conference/Workshop

Following table provides the data regarding participation in the seminar/conference/workshop in a year.

**Table 14 (a) : Participation in Conference/Seminar by Medical Practitioners**

Yes		No	
Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
269	91.18	26	8.81

Out of 295 medical practitioners of Varanasi district 91.18% practitioners had participated in seminar, conference, and workshop held at different level, whereas 8.81% of the medical practitioners did not participate in any seminar, conference, workshop held at different levels.

**Table 14(b) : Average Number of Seminar/Conference Attended in a Year**

Average	Number	Percentage
Only one (1) in a year	94	34.94
Only two or three in a year	146	54.27
More than three in a year	29	10.78
Total	269	91.18

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On question with regard to the average number of seminar, conference attended by medical practitioners of Varanasi district, Table 14(b) reveals that 94(34.94%) practitioners stated that they attended one conference on an average per year; 146(54.27%) practitioners stated that they attended 2 or 3 seminar/conference every year; whereas 29(10.78%) of the medical practitioners mentioned that they attended more than 3 conference every year.

**Table 14(c) : Preference of Journals for Publication of Articles**

Preference	Number	Percentage
National	67	65.64
International	28	27.18
Department Journal	63	61.16
Edited book	22	21.35

The analysis regarding the preference of journals for publishing their articles/papers by medical practitioners of Varanasi district, Table 14(c) reveals that 65.64% practitioners stated that they preferred national level journals for publishing their articles, while 27.18% of the practitioners prefer international level journals for getting their articles/papers publications. Whereas 61.16% of the practitioners prefer local journals for getting their articles published. While 21.35% generally for getting their articles published in edited books in form of a chapters.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The various categories of medical practitioners engaged in their profession required different types of information at the right time in order to make the right decision. Most of the medical practitioners, in this study are uniform in their preference for journals, internet resources and services as the most important sources of information for their teaching and research purposes. The medical practitioners are really people who shoulder the responsibility of healthy nation building by exercising their efforts in creating new information, owing to the importance of such elite community as users of the library. The study indicates that the most of the medical practitioners are much diversified in the information they seek, the sources they access and the use they make of the information. It is difficult to maintain support for the idea of a single mode of formal information sources. However, the

scientific journals have been ranked first for obtaining specific information and keeping up-to-date information, while it has been ranked second with regard to acquiring background information.

As such, orientation programs should be organized for them so that variety of library resources could have optimum use. However, in order to come up to the needs of medical practitioners, librarians need to understand thoroughly their needs and the ways they consult the library. The results of this study revealed that respondents visited the library for searching the required information. Majority of the respondents, who considered the location of their library convenient to them, reported visiting it more frequently. The librarian should come forward to understand the actual need and identify field of interest that the medical practitioners have their priority and to develop the library resources making the collection more purposeful and need based, which in fact, will bring immense benefit to the medical practitioners.

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