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Jonathan D. Eldredge

Charity T. Karcher

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Recommended Citation

Eldredge, Jonathan D. and Charity T. Karcher. "Determinants of Effective Library Faculty – Pharmacy Faculty Communication. A Randomized Controlled Trial." (2002). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hslic-posters-presentations/81>

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Health Sciences Library and Informatics Center

Determinants of Effective Library Faculty – Pharmacy Faculty Communication. A Randomized Controlled Trial

Jonathan D. Eldredge, MLS, PhD

CT Karcher, MLIS

Objectives

- To measure the effect of direct contact (in-person interviews lasting 30-60 minutes) between a library faculty member and members of the UNM College of Pharmacy faculty
- To adapt the randomized controlled trial study design to test a common idea about the efficacy of direct, in-person communication

Background

- MLA Annual Conference 2001 plenary speaker Carol Kinsey Goman asserted that “high touch” direct, in-person communication might be more effective than high-tech communication. What evidence exists to support this idea?
- Population: Library and Informatics Center serves a school of medicine, colleges of nursing and pharmacy, five allied health programs, and offsite users via an outreach program

Setting

- The UNM Health Sciences Library and Informatics Center hired its first Pharmacy Librarian during 2000.
- The new Pharmacy Librarian began work in January 2001.
- She had limited contact with College of Pharmacy faculty during her initial training period.
- The authors recognized an opportunity to utilize a randomized controlled trial to test this common idea about the efficacy of in-person communication.

Methods

- Randomized Controlled Trial
- An initial survey was sent to 24 College of Pharmacy faculty members
 - Excluded Dean, two associate deans and one professor who had had sustained contact with new pharmacy librarian
- 18 faculty members returned initial survey
- 18 faculty members were **stratified** according to the following alternative hypotheses:
 - Basic Science or Pharmacy Practice specialization
 - Faculty rank of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor

Intervention

- Once stratified, the names of the 18 faculty members were randomized into control or intervention (interview) status
- The pharmacy librarian continued to pursue only any necessary email and phone communications with faculty members randomized into the **control** group.
- The pharmacy librarian interviewed those faculty members who were randomized into the **intervention** group for approximately 30-60 minutes. She also continued to pursue any necessary email or phone communications with these faculty members.

Second Survey

- All faculty members who had completed the first survey, whether in either the intervention or control group, were sent a second follow-up survey once the pharmacy librarian completed her in-person interviews.
- 14 viable second surveys were received
- This second survey contained six (6) items also included on the first survey:

Common Survey Elements

From Both the First and Second Surveys

- Assess the following aspects of the library and informatics center in terms of your research and teaching needs:
 - Journals
 - Books
 - Services
 - Overall performance
- How often do you visit the library and informatics center:
 - Physically
 - Virtually

Table 1 Change in Responses

Survey Question	No Change	Positive/ Increase	Negative/ Decrease	No Change	Positive/ Increase	Negative/ Decrease
Journals	6	0	1	3	3	1
Books	4	1	2	3	1	3
Services	3	3	1	4	2	1
Overall	4	2	1	4	3	0
Physical Visits	5	0	2	7	0	0
Virtual Visits	4	2	1	3	2	2
Subtotals	26	8	8	24	11	7

Yellow = Intervention

Blue = Control

Analysis of Table 1

- Nearly identical numbers of unchanged perceptions or self-reported behavior between intervention and control groups
- Marginal differences between intervention and control groups for either positive/negative changes in perception or increased/decreased behavior
- Slight increase in positive perceptions/increased behavior in control group?
- Tables 2 and 3 examine two alternative hypotheses

Table 2 Division in Pharmacy

Survey Question	No Change	Positive/ Increase	Negative/ Decrease	No Change	Positive/ Increase	Negative/ Decrease
Journals	3	2	2	6	1	0
Books	3	2	2	4	0	3
Services	3	3	1	4	2	1
Overall	2	3	2	6	1	0
Physical Visits	7	0	0	5	0	2
Virtual Visits	5	1	1	2	2	3
Subtotals	23	11	8	27	6	9

Yellow = Basic Science Blue = Pharmacy Practice

Table 3 Length of Service

Survey Question	No Change	Positive/ Increase	Negative/ Decrease	No Change	Positive/ Increase	Negative/ Decrease
Journals	5	2	1	4	1	1
Books	4	2	2	3	0	3
Services	5	3	0	2	2	2
Overall	4	3	1	4	2	0
Physical Visits	8	0	0	4	0	2
Virtual Visits	5	1	2	2	3	1
Subtotals	31	11	6	19	8	9

Yellow = 1 to 4 Years Blue = 5 or More Years

Results

- **Table 1** suggests rejection of the hypothesis on the efficacy of direct, in-person communication
- **Table 2** suggests that while Basic Science Division might have become more positively inclined the Pharmacy Practice Division faculty might have become slightly more negatively inclined over time
- **Table 3** suggests that pharmacy faculty with fewer than 5 years of service to UNM acquired more favorable perceptions (28%) of the Library and Informatics Center over the course of this study, regardless of intervention or control group status

Discussion

Potential Confounders:

- Small number ($n = 14$) of subjects
- September 11th terrorist attacks coincided roughly with the intervention or control phase of this study thereby raising possibility of the “Interaction of History and Treatment” threat to validity
- A major journals cancellation project during the latter part of this study might have affected faculty members’ perceptions
- Perhaps this study involved an inadequate amount of intervention (in-person interview) to detect a dose-response by survey respondents (viz., study dealt with a threshold variable)? Would several more interventions (interviews/visits) by library faculty member with pharmacy faculty members produced this hypothesized threshold effect?

Conclusion

- This pilot study suggests that the randomized controlled trial study design appears to be adaptable to a study of librarian-faculty communications
- Results suggest rejection of hypothesis that direct contact generates more positive perceptions or increases in usage behaviors
- Adjusted data analysis suggests that shorter length of service among faculty members might affect perceptions and behavior positively

For more information contact Jonathan Eldredge, MLS, PhD,
jeldredge@salud.unm.edu