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# USE OF THE INTERNET RESOURCES BY STAFF AND STUDENTS IN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS AND LAGOS UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL

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## Abstract

*A survey of staff and students of College of Medicine, University of Lagos and Lagos University Teaching Hospital was conducted in the year 2000 to examine how they used the Internet resource donated to the community by the Christopher Kolade Foundation, the previous year. The subject of study comprised of Physicians, Scientists, Allied Medical Professionals, Medical Personnel and Medical Librarians. The majority used the E-mail, the Web and other Internet Services based in the United States. The subjects of this study claimed several advantages from Internet use. On the average about 80% reported that the Internet kept them better informed, while 70% thought it was "simply fascinating". There was expressed need for Internet courses as well as evaluation and presentation of Internet source. In this vein, an average of 55% of these focus groups wanted clearer presentation of medical Internet resource, while an average of 48% of the respondents requested for the introduction of more Internet related services to the ones presently being provided.*

## Introduction

The Internet is a catalyst that is changing the Librarian from an information caretaker to information Navigator and educator, (Ohles & Walton, 1996).

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1999, Internet facilities donated by the Christopher Kolade Foundation was commissioned at the Medical Library, College of Medicine, University of Lagos. The services offered were e-mail address for Library Users and full access to the Internet through surfing. This service came via 8 workstations situated at the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Medical Library. By this event the Medical Library became one of the few "state of the art library" in Nigeria. Viewing this event in the light of occurrences in which many libraries the world over are beginning to lose their former monopoly as more users are benefiting from easily accessible databases, as Library clients, independent of the libraries are now performing simple and sophisticated searches. Medical library users are also becoming increasingly aware of information on the Internet. The development is relatively recent as only about one-sixth of the medical professionals who were active Internet users had used it for more than four years.

(health on the net foundation 1998). In Nigeria, Librarians like Ojo-Igbinoba (1997) are advocating the need for Internet to be situated in every Library given its versatility in information provision and dissemination, so that University staff and students may have access to it.

Unlike German Medical professionals who according to Oliver (1998) had a population of 7.4% connectivity to the Internet more than 4 years ago, most libraries including medical libraries in Nigeria have not gained access to the Internet as at 2001 (NLA 2001).

However, for the few that do have Internet connectivity like the College of Medicine, University of Lagos, Medical Library, there is need for the library to understand how clients use the Internet in order to appropriately serve their information need. There is also need to know what benefits and disadvantages are experienced. Most importantly, what expectations they have of the library regarding the Internet must be known.

Several studies exist that examine the Internet use of Medical professional. Dissanayake and Dayesclare (1999) studied the pattern of use of information made available via the Internet websites. They concluded that there was wide gap in use of information available at the website between web surfers from developed and developing countries. They recommended that government of developing countries must plan to make telecommunications services affordable and available. Mehta (1999) also discovered through his research that though Internet can be very useful to physicians it also presented several frustrations because of too much irrelevant information. He offered them practical tips to avoid time wastage and frustration faced in searching for medical information on the Internet.

In Nigeria, even though there is growing awareness of the usefulness of the Internet for medical studies, Internet use is still at an infantile stage. Adedeji (2001), Sofolowe (2001) and Ojo-Igbinoba (1997) despite this, have through their papers tried to assist users tap the wealth of knowledge contained in the Internet. Sofoluwe suggests that information technology (IT) training be made available to all medical graduates so that they can take advantage of the resources in the Internet. In the same manner, Adedeji requested all researchers especially medical researchers to "sharpen their Internet exploratory skill" because of the vastness of medical information in the Internet.

From the above, it is obvious that the Internet though new to Nigeria is viewed with curiosity and interest especially by members of staff and students in Nigerian higher institutions.

and return ratio. The questions included job title, intensity of Internet usage, preferred services and resources expected or experienced, advantages and suggestions for Internet related services that could be included to those already offered by the medical library.

Between June and July 2000, about a year after the Internet service had been functional in the Medical Library, (CMUL) the questionnaires were administered to three hundred and fifty users of the Internet resources. This was done at the point of entry into the Internet office and the questionnaire was given back when the user was leaving the office. The ratio of distribution was as depicted on table 1.

Table 1

## Frequency of questionnaire returned

Respondents	No. distributed	No. returned	% of questionnaire return
Students	150	132	38
Physician	60	50	14
Scientists	40	40	11
Allied Health Sciences professionals	40	23	7
Medical Personnel	30	13	4
Medical	30	7	2
Total	350	265	76

**RESULTS**

Two hundred and seventy three (273) of the questionnaires were returned. Eight of these were excluded because the respondents were neither staff nor students of College of Medicine or Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH). The returned usable questionnaires were two hundred and sixty five (265). Further analysis revealed as follows: students (132), Physicians (50), Scientists (40), Allied Health Professionals i.e. administrator, Account staff, Technicians (13), and Medical Librarians (7)



Table 2

## Extent of use of the Internet by respondents

Hours of usage	Number	%
<1 hr	78	29
1-2 hrs	135	51
3-4 hrs	29	11
5-6 hrs	15	6
7-10 hrs	6	2
10hrs – above	2	0.8

As depicted on table 2, the majority of the respondents (51%) used the Internet from one-two hours a week. 29% used the internet for one hour or less. Only 2% of the subjects used the Internet from seven to ten hours a week. A close look at the record also revealed that overall, the Medical students (62%), Physician (56%), Allied Health professionals (66%), Health personnel (40%) and Librarians (635) used the Internet at about the same intensity. The medical personnel used the Internet less frequently and when they did it was basically to send e-mails. This may be due to the nature of their work, which is purely administrative.

On the question of the duration of their use of Internet resources, 185 (90%) respondents stated that they had been using it from one-two years. 57 (22%) had used it for less than one year, while 9% had used it from three-four years. None of those questioned had used it for more than 5 years.

Table 3

## Internet Service Used Most Frequently

E-mail	265 (100%)
Newsgroup	50 (19%)
Telnet	1 (4%)
File Transfer Protocol (FTP)	
Archive	2 (8%)
Copen	
Veronica	4 (2%)
World Wide Web	253 (95%)
Others	

The Internet service most commonly used were essentially the same for the different categories of CMUL staff and students. All the respondent used E-mail and 95% used the web. The third most popular service was the newsgroup with 19% attesting to having used it before. File Transfer Protocol (FTP) recorded one-percent use while the rest of the services had less than 1% use. The reason for this could be due to

the fact that most of them may not even know what they could do with the resources (see table 3 for more details).

Due to the small number of the Internet sites listed, the answers were not further sub-divided by users group. This notwithstanding, as reported on table 4, the respondents indicated their preferred website to include Hotmail (74%), Yahoo (59%) , Netscape (56%), Usanet (53%) Medline (40%). National Library of Medicine (35%) World Health Organisation (26%) and Virtual hospital (8%) were also favourite sites for many of the respondents.

**Table 4: Preferred Websites**

Hotmail	69%
Netscape	56%
Usanet	53%
Medline	40%
NLM	35%
WHO	26%
Virtual Hospital	8%

#### **Benefits of using the Internet**

More than any other group of respondents, the Librarians and the physicians declared that the Internet facilitated their ability in being better informed as well as making contact with colleagues (100-90 percent respectively), for 60% of the physicians and students, it was the only way of getting some information. To have desktop access to information resource was more important to the physicians, scientists and students than the Librarians, Allied Healthcare professionals and medical personnel. This supports Hollanders (1999) findings that 80% of students wanted integrated computer applications into medical curriculum as a means of reforming medical education. Information for diagnosis and therapy up-to-date was the most important to physician with 89% responses. A majority of all the respondents, students (79%), Physicians (88%) Scientists (63%) Allied Healthcare professionals (62) Medical personnel (59%) and Librarians (70%) attested to the fact that the Internet was "simply fascinating".



Table 5

## Suggested Internet Library services

		Medical Students	Physicians	Scientist	Allied Professionals	Health Personnel	Medical Librarians
1	Presentation of Internet Medical Research	57	65	62	60	30	54
2	Introduction courses	67	61	59	63	80	49
3	Evaluation of medical Internet resources	55	90	71	60	52	55
4	Databases via the Internet	20	40	32	11	15	18
5	Inter Library Loan	11	22	32	15	5	70
6	Introduce more Internet related services	72	69	56	52	66	42

As depicted on table 5, on the average the six user groups of Library client requested the following six Internet Library Services as follows: The Physicians (85%), Scientist (63%) and Allied Healthcare Professionals (60%) more than everybody else wanted a clearer presentation of Internet Medical resources. On the other hand, the Medical Personnel and Allied Healthcare Professionals were more interested in introduction course on the use of the Internet than the rest of the group.

One of the respondents went further to suggest that an introductory users course be organized every "forth monthly" for those of them who were interested. This is similar to what is obtainable in Danish Libraries (Ormes 1998). The Physician (90%), the Scientist (71%) and the Allied Healthcare Professionals (61%), more than the other members of the group, were more interested in the evaluation of the medical Internet resources. Database via the Internet had its highest response of 40% from the Physicians and the least from Libraries (18%). Inter Library-Loan via the Internet had its highest respondent from the Librarians (70%) and the least from students (11%). The reason for this may be due to the fact that Inter Library Loan Service is one of the functions of the Library. All the respondents saw the need for greater use of Internet related service. Many of them (50%) suggested Internet Telephone. Some of the respondents especially the physicians (40%) wanted the PFD Software that will enable them to download conference forms from the Internet. Seventy-nine percent of all the respondents wanted the constant interruption due to poor telephone line and power outages to stop. Some who were aware that this disruption was due to poor telephone line suggested that wireless telephone or Nitel dedicated lines be used. They also recommended that a standby generating set be purchased for the service.

### Conclusion

The Internet has become an important technology and a valuable resource for a health sciences Librarian to contribute to healthcare delivery in Nigeria. This can be done through the provision of traditional services, in addition to functioning as information navigator and educator. This statement is supported by the results of the finding in this paper where students and staff of CMUL and LUTH were unanimous in the view regarding preferred Internet services, benefit of using the Internet and suggestions for the improvement of the Internet Services

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#### Keywords:

Internet, Health Science Library, Physician