

Pilot Study of Informationist Mediated Search

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This pilot study examined why informationist patrons request mediated searches from their informationists. Statistics from the NIH Library showed a precipitous decline in requests for mediated searches until the informationist program was introduced in 2001 and the decline was reversed. Because this occurred during a time in which more NIH Library end users conducted their own literature searches and reported their preference for doing so, we sought to understand what causes patrons to request a mediated search.

Grounded theory was the guiding framework for the qualitative study. Our team studied NIH Library patrons who are served by an informationist and who had requested mediated literature searches. We sought patrons in a variety of settings/assignments (clinical research, patient care, extramural program management, basic research, policy or research coordination). We conducted semi-structured interviews of 15-20 minutes duration with six patrons. No patron was interviewed by his or her own informationist. The questions asked during the interviews included brief background questions, reasons that patrons needed literature searches, and their experiences with mediated searches.

We recorded the interviews and transcribed the recorded interviews. Three team members independently analyzed two transcribed interviews using the constant comparison method to identify key concepts and themes. The individual analyses of each interview were in substantial agreement.

Hypotheses generated, grounding (support in the data) for the hypotheses, results, and conclusions will be presented at the LRS-V.