Social Workers and Consumer Health Information: Waiting in the Bullpen

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Purpose:

 To explore medical librarians' experience and interest in health information outreach to the social work community

Background:

- 642,000 social workers in the United States
- 43% work in health related areas (medicine, public health, substance abuse, and mental health)
- Health related area projected to grow 21% between 2008 and 2018.
- Lack of medical librarian outreach to social workers and their patients



Methods:

- Interviews with librarians at Masters in Social Work (MSW) programs across the country
- Focus Group with Informationists at the National Institutes of Health Library
- Literature Review in medical and social work databases
- Survey to the Regional Medical Libraries of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine

Results:

- Literature review found no systematic health information needs assessment of the social work community
- 36% of social work clients have at least one health condition
- 16% of citations in social work journals are from medical journals
- The survey to the Regional Medical Libraries (100% response rate) revealed that they do not specifically target social workers as a population for health information outreach
- 7 of 8 Regional Medical Libraries indicated interest in participating in future stages of research

Conclusion:

The social work field is a dynamic public health profession in need of targeted health information outreach. Moving forward, there is a need for:

- Survey to the NN/LM member libraries
- Focus groups with social workers and medical librarians
- Information
 needs assessment of
 social workers
- Pilot projects that include medical librarians and members of the social work community

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