

SELF-FINANCING SERVICES IN LIBRARIES : A METHOD OF INCREASING LIMITED LIBRARY BUDGETS IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA?

Sally WOOD-LAMONT, F.L.A., Library Consultant

*Ioana ROBU, MSc, Director,
Central University Library of the University
of Medicine and Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca*

Background

The Central University Library of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca commenced a full programme of automation in March 1994. All hardware and software was bought by a consortium of Scottish charities and assisted by a Soros grant. By October 1994 our library was ready to initiate full circulation. New readers were registered on computer; 60% of the foreign books had been entered on the database ; Romanian books from 1985 and 40% of the multiple textbooks. We now turned our attention to providing the services that all Western libraries do as a matter of course and which Romanian libraries have had limited opportunity to install. The primary problem was finance. The recurrent library budget given by the University covers mostly book and periodical acquisitions. However the cost of consumables and other equipment must be borne in the majority by the library itself.

In order to utilise our recurrent budget to the best possible advantage for our readers we broke completely from the traditional methods of using Romanian State book/periodical agents. We order all our books from a Scottish Bookseller in Edinburgh, Donald Ferrier Ltd., who gives us 10% discount on most purchases covering the cost of transport. Therefore we are able to purchase our annual order at cost price, with no problems of delivery and without the expensive levies of the Romanian state agents. Similarly we order our periodicals direct from Swets and Zeitlinger in Frankfurt and gain a 2% discount and now have one of the best services in all libraries for the receipt of journals. We are able to claim missing issues and fill gaps without any problems, a service that is supposedly available with state agencies but has a very low success rate.

However if we wanted to continue improvements in the library then we had to find the resources ourself and a conscious decision was made to introduce fees for additional library services given.

Photocopying

Photocopying services are very rarely given by the library themselves. Many have their own photocopier but only for their own private use. In many cases libraries have received as a donation, a xerox machine but without a budget for consumables - paper, toner and regular services - and the country is now littered with new xerox machines which lie unused waiting for the next donation of paper or toner.

We persuaded the Rector of the University to purchase a photocopier for the library, promising we would make it self-financing and that it would be for the use of all readers. In fact he bought three Cannon photocopiers for the Medical University one of which was placed in the library along with a colour photocopier that was included as an extra in the deal. We received 2 toner cartridges and a supply of 2 reams of paper; the latter was supplemented by a supply of paper (20 reams) I had received as a donation. (This paper was not A4 size but we asked the Cannon engineer to alter one of the paper trays in order to adapt for its use). With this extra stock of paper we had the means to build up a cash flow, necessary to start a proper self-financing service where we could buy toner and paper as we required it. We surveyed the rates charged by everyone else in town and also worked out the cost pro rata of each copy taking into consideration all aspects, time, toner and paper costs and agreed on a price that was slightly cheaper than most but would maintain our cash flow. This xerox machine also allowed us to make another new rule in the library : periodicals were no longer allowed to be borrowed. In the past many journal issues were permitted for loan because the more important users said that as we had no photocopying facilities and they had not time to read the journals, they must be available for loan. This resulted in gaps in our collections as many of them remained at hospital departments and were never returned. In addition other readers, in lesser positions, were denied the opportunity to read many of the current journals because they were permanently on loan. We moved the young typist into an office on her own elevating her position to secretary and xerox operator. She is now the pivot of the library, answering the telephone, dealing with enquiries, organising the xeroxing and providing a first class service which is one of the best and most competitively priced services in the town. I must add that the other two xerox machines have suffered the same fate as many others in Romania : one is broken and one is only used when someone buys paper or toner.

Spiral Binding & Laminating

A spiral binding machine and a laminating machine had been purchased with the initial donation from Scottish charities as we knew these facilities would be needed for the library itself e.g. signing, rebinding etc. However we were frequently asked to spiral bind for readers and to make badges for conferences, doctors etc. It was logical to again make this a self-financing service, working out costs that would be much cheaper than were being offered in only one other location in town and in this way help the staff and students of the University and also help ourselves. In fact we are now doing many badges for Medical Conferences, for all Library related conferences and for other University conferences in the city. In addition these conferences can now offer spiral bound programmes, laminated publicity notices and also copies of papers given, all of which enhance the image that our Medical University is projecting internally and externally.

Borrowers Cards

The decision to charge for borrowers cards was yet again one of necessity. Though we had an initial supply of 1000 self-seal laminating pouches and we made each of our borrowers cards on a template on the computer - white for student, blue for staff, green for external- ready made plastic ones could only have been ordered from abroad and were far too expensive to consider. In order to purchase more we had to have money and therefore we decided to charge every borrower a token sum of 500 lei - raised to 1000 lei and now 2000 lei because of inflation - which would help us to maintain the supply of these. If readers lost their borrowers cards then they had to also purchase another. We were both pleasantly surprised at the readiness that this was accepted by everyone - long queues were frequent with students proud to have their borrowing card with their photo as evidence of being a medical student.

Medline Printouts

In our library we have Ovid Medline Plus, Biosis Abstracts and Bookbank. With the former we have as yet no printers attached to the computers. Readers are allowed to download their references onto diskettes but many of the readers do not have ready access to computers themselves. There were frequent requests to print these references out. We therefore made this a fee-paying

service with a maximum of ten pages free of charge because of the time involved and the cost of the paper. Thereafter we charged 100 lei per page. This again has proved very successful firstly because we compel the reader to be more selective in what he/she requires and they appreciate the possibilities of being able to take away the information. We also purchase diskettes which are made available at cost price so that readers can use them to download information.

International Document Delivery Service

In the past the only method of obtaining articles from abroad was scouring Current Contents, Clinical Science and Life Sciences for relevant articles and then writing to authors for complimentary copies. The prohibitive cost of Romanian postage in relation to current salaries has almost halted this practice and in addition many journals have stopped giving free copies of articles to submitting authors. Our library was the first Romanian library to initiate an International Document Delivery Service linking with the British Medical Association Library in London. They charge 3.60p - \$5.50 for each article, offering a splendid seven day delivery service. Title of journal, volume number, year, page numbers and author are faxed over; the library charges the full cost to the requester but bears the cost of the fax itself and this is now a well established and popular fee-paying service. However the availability of articles is limited to the periodical holdings of the BMA library which has around 360 titles and at present I, with the Library Association of Great Britain, am in negotiation with the British Library Boston Spa to make their extensive periodical holdings available for Document Delivery at the same price as the BMA library. Boston Spa currently charges 15/\$22 per article which is completely out of reach to all Romanians whose current salary is around \$60 per month.

Fines

Fines are charged for overdue loans, lost books and for disregard to library regulations. These fines are symbolic to commence with but increase with the severity of the offence. For instance, it may be from 1500 lei (15 cents) up to 3 days overdue to 40,000 lei (5 dollars) for 3 months overdue. There are also set fines, e.g. 5000 lei (80 cents) for failure to report to the desk before entering the open access shelves area. Though fines would seem to be the quickest way of making money, the keyword of our policy is flexibility, which means that we very seldom fine a user on the first offence and

we try to differentiate between deliberate and unintentional offences. After all we want to offer a better service, not to treat users as criminals.

Results and discussion

However these ideas have not been accepted easily in practice and a big factor of this reluctance is that old mentalities continue to persist both within the library staff and by its users. In the Communist times and still now in the supposedly Post-Communist era, self-financing schemes and user-paid schemes meant lining the pockets of the director or the person who inaugurated them. There was no consideration of loyalty to the library only the thought of an easy method to obtain money by fleecing the hand that pays the salary. Our readers were very suspicious and initially perceived the changes as only a method of the Library Staff making money on the side. The Library Staff too thought of it initially as a way of making extra money for themselves and then when we insisted on receipts being given and proper books being kept they became wary of us. Where was the money going? There were also complaints from the senior staff of the Medical University

a) because they felt that their senior position gave them privileges of borrowing journals regardless of the fact that if they had the whole issue of a current journal out no one else could access it b) they also expected free photocopying and free user cards c) they also asked where the money was going. The only solution was to show ostentatiously that money obtained from self-financing schemes was for the benefit of the library. Therefore meticulous accounts were kept and shown at each library meeting. A new switchboard was purchased with some of the self-financed money so that instead of only two telephones in the library there were another four extensions giving benefit to all the staff. A new carpet was bought for the protocol room. One room was given to Periodicals and for the first time periodicals were put on open access. Periodical display furniture was therefore necessary and though we could not order ready-made from abroad because of the high price involved, we commissioned from a local joiner in a nearby village five periodical display cupboards in pine. Six months later a further two were added bringing the total number of available space for display to 140 titles. Total cost for all of these was only \$565. A newspaper rack display cupboard was commissioned also. Binding material was also bought to strengthen the spines of the heavily used Romanian medical manuals and the staff at the issue desk repair these over the summer vacation. The major advantage of having our own self-finance means also that services are maintained without any delays for replenishment of materials,

again a problem of the past. Many a service initiation in the past has fallen by the wayside for lack of continuous investment. We also tried to instil in our staff better public relations, this latter induction being one of the most difficult to introduce. In Romania, as in many Eastern European countries, one treats the reader according to his/her rank in the University, or whether the reader is a friend or relation. How could we introduce fee-paying services for every reader without the courtesy to accompany them. We had to convince the Library Staff and University Staff that all new fee-paying services were above board, that they were benefitting the library and readers. After a year, pride and trust in the management has been introduced into the library : morale both inside and outside has been heightened and at long last there is a sense of working together in the library. The University staff are slowly accepting the changes in the library and anxious to use all the services within it. Rectors from other Romanian Medical Universities and Medical Librarians are asking us to assist in installing these ideas in their libraries. We have already held a conference in Craiova for all Medical Libraries that we were asked to organise in order to promulgate our example throughout the country. Our library has been elevated to top position in this field with medical doctors coming from all over the country to use our services and also many students from other academic universities. In our Foreign Book and Periodicals department 35% of users are External users now. However we still have work to do with regard to changing the attitudes of readers to libraries and library staff and, unfortunately, vice-versa. It is still thought by many that the only way to get a book out of a library is by personal contact and by personal gifts, the principal way by which all things are obtained in Romania. Many phonecalls are made direct to staff starting with the legendary words "I am a friend, cousin, mother of...". I require a book." Many readers come in with a bunch of flowers or bearing a recommendation from an important person in the mistaken belief that this is the ONLY way they can achieve loan of material required or assistance in finding research material. I have often seen readers returning a book, hovering embarrassedly and when asked if they need help, saying they want to return the book to the librarian who helped them borrow the book. Very few actually come direct to the library and just think of asking on their own merit - the idea of being given the most basic library service without due payment does not cross their mind. I must add that though I have managed to succeed to try to stamp out this practice both with library staff and readers as much as possible, it has remained embedded in the minds of certain people. This is a fundamental cultural attitude in Romanian society which will take a generation of librarians and readers to change. All we can do at present is demonstrate the correct, new methodology and hope it will overtake the old.