

■ These librarians help doctors search for reliable medical information and case studies from across the world

# A dose of *information*

JINAL SHAH

**I**T'S a common Catch-22 situation for doctors: When they see patients, especially those with less common disorders, there is the itch to trawl the Internet for more information, for treatment patterns and case studies. But while there is never enough time, there is also the worrying question of what from the World Wide Web is absolutely reliable.

That's where Vasumati Sriganesh (50) and her team of librarians step in. They are 'clinical librarians' at non-profit organization Omed Knowledge Foundation and are playing an increasingly key role as support systems for doctors in both private and public hospitals.

"The role of the clinical librarian includes catering to the immediate needs of clinicians for patient care, providing literature searches and articles to support the evidence, supporting the development of new guidelines and proactively creating resources for evidence-based care," Sriganesh says. Omed Knowledge Foundation, initially a private limited company, transformed itself into a non-profit organisation aiming to reach out to a large number of doctors.

Even though doctors use the Internet for case references, many admit that they are unaware of which are the most trusted online sources. "Searching the 'I' of the 'IT' is what we work around; and the techniques of searching articles in a short time span while ensuring the authenticity of the article are our main criteria," adds the CEO of the foundation, who earlier worked with the library of the PD Hinduja Hospital.

"We make searching much easier and help doctors identify whether other doctors who have published their articles in the journals are genuine or not, using simple tricks and without contesting the medical content. Also, many a time, we help doctors communicate with their counterparts from developed countries for case handling," Sriganesh says.

Also, with medical information websites cropping up a dime a dozen, evidence-based searches, especially for postgraduate students working on their theses, is another key area of work. "Students who want to get infor-



Vasumati Sriganesh

mation use the Internet, but whatever they get is not always evidence-based. It is very important to get knowledge efficiently, quickly and that which is evidence-based," admits Dr K G Nair, academic director at Holy Family Hospital. "Also, if practising doctors like us want to write a paper, we do not have time to search for information. Knowledge banks like these provide you with authentic and full literature on any

topic."

On Saturday, Sriganesh's foundation launched a website ([www.indian-medicalsites.in](http://www.indian-medicalsites.in)) to make searching for websites of hospitals, doctors and other medicine-related queries much simpler. "Nowadays, many young professionals migrate to other cities and states completely unaware of the basic medical facilities in their vicinity. This website will serve as a platform to

search for hospitals, some clinics and nursing homes in their vicinity that they can bank on," says Girish Kunkur, director of programmes at Omed Knowledge Foundation. Kunkur is a former British Council librarian.

As against developed countries, there is no course for clinical librarians in formal education systems, they lament. "Every year, there are many who fall out of the MBBS course. If

these candidates do a degree in Science followed by degrees in Information Sciences with a specialisation in medical or clinical librarianship, we could see a new tribe of professionals who would be in the medical profession, deeply involved in a non-practice area," says Sriganesh, who is also vice-president of the Indian Association for Medical Informatics.

An additional initiative by this re-

source bank is to support and collaborate with Healthcare Information For All By 2015, a global campaign with professionals from across more than 100 countries participating to ensure that every person in India will have access to an informed healthcare provider by 2015. It's seven years from now, but Sriganesh and her team already have their hands full.

[jinal.shah@expressindia.com](mailto:jinal.shah@expressindia.com)