THE SUCCESS OF ELECTRONIC TEXTBOOKS IN THE MEDICAL CURRICULUM

Anne Huffman, MLS and Jason Stirnaman, MLS. A.R. Dykes Library and School of Medicine, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City.

Purpose

We examine the acquisition process, distribution, technological considerations, training issues and student and faculty adoption of e-textbooks. We will focus on e-text use within the context of the tablet PC and how these technologies work together to enhance the learning experience.

Methods

In Fall 2006, School of Medicine launched a new integrated curriculum along with an innovative technology pilot for first-year medical students. The pilot provided tablet-style personal computers for 183 students. The tablet PCs were bundled with two comparable note-taking software applications.

Earlier in the year, a task group was formed to evaluate e-text platforms. The task group comprised library staff and School of Medicine faculty and staff. Textbook packages from two publishers and two content delivery models were selected. One delivery model was similar to the familiar online database. The other model used recently developed e-book software technology. E-text content was provided along with technical support to students at the beginning of the semester. Content from a third publisher using the same e-book platform was acquired and distributed later in the semester. Survey responses were collected from students after the first eight-week module and at mid-year. A third evaluation will be administered at the end of the academic year. Faculty opinions and use patterns will be collected anecdotally and by interview.

Results

Selection, acquisition, distribution, and support are critical factors leading up to e-text adoption. After the first eight-week module, 67% of students agreed that the e-text content integrated well with other course material; 64% agreed that the e-texts were easy to use; 29% of students preferred e-texts to print, while 25% were undecided. And, 83% of students responded that tablet PC note-taking applications were their primary means of note taking.

Conclusion

Electronic textbooks have some distinct advantages over print in the medical curriculum. The success of e-textbooks may strongly correlate with the benefits of the tablet PC; the advantages offered by digital note-taking software allow students to integrate e-text content into the learning process in unique ways. E-texts combined with tablet PC technology lead to new ways of using and integrating textbook content into the learning process. While e-texts offer many benefits, several important factors beyond content and pricing should be considered before introducing them into the curriculum.