

# The pandemic made librarians step out of frames

Ülle Kuuse, Eve Pohlak and Angela Räis

Tallinn Health Care College, Tallin, Estonia

### Abstract

*Major changes in the world in the last few years have resulted in new services provided by the library of Tallinn Health Care College, as well as in other libraries. This paper presents the ways how the librarians of the College's library are adapting to current new situation, and how it has caused librarians to create innovative ways to further support teaching and research activities in the College. In addition, the requirements of the College offer challenges for librarians, which lead to step out of the frames and test themselves in their new roles. This paper also demonstrates the role of the librarians as teachers and gives a quick overview of different activities the librarians are engaged in the library of Tallinn Health Care College.*

**Key words:** *Tallinn Health Care College Library; library services; teaching; pandemics.*

### Introduction

The library of Tallinn Health Care College (<https://www.ttk.ee/en/library/tallinn-health-care-college-library>) is a professional library, which collects, maintains, and makes the health care literature and databases available for users. The library forms the books in accordance with the specialities trained in the Tallinn Health Care College: nurse, midwife, assistant pharmacist, optometrist, dental technician, occupational therapist, health promotion, emergency medical technician, care worker, assistive technology specialist, client worker for people with mental health problems, sterilisation technician, child minder, dental assistant and assistant pharmacist (in English). It is located in two buildings: in the Tallinn study building and in the Kohtla-Järve structural unit. There are three employees in total – two librarians in Tallinn and one in Kohtla-Järve.

### Stepping out of the frames

Major changes in the world have brought new services to the library of Tallinn Health Care College, as well as to all other libraries. The situation has made librarians think about the ways to further support teaching and research in the College. In addition, the requirements

of the College present challenges for librarians resulting in us to step out of the frames and test ourselves in a new role.

The measures and restrictions necessary to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have been strictly adhered to. In order to protect librarians and visitors, compliance with the requirement of keeping a safe distance from others has become a daily occurrence, protective glass has been installed on the service counters, hands and common items have been disinfected. Some of the computers in the library have waterproof keyboards and a mouse, which the librarian cleans with detergent after each use.

The pandemic has shifted the focus of the library's main services. Communication and counselling by computer and telephone have been brought to the forefront. Active direct contacts with library users have remained more in the background.

A non-contact borrowing of the collections items is in use. The request to borrow is submitted via e-mail or by telephone. Ordered collections items are there for the client on the agreed date, packed and marked by their names on the separate table marked as "Ordered collections items" (*Figure 1*) next to the front door of the College.

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*Address for correspondence:* Eve Pohlak, Tallinn Health Care College, Kännu 67, 13418 Tallinn, Estonia.  
E-mail: [eve.pohlak@ttk.ee](mailto:eve.pohlak@ttk.ee)

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Fig. 1. The table of ordered items.

Photo: Eve Poblak

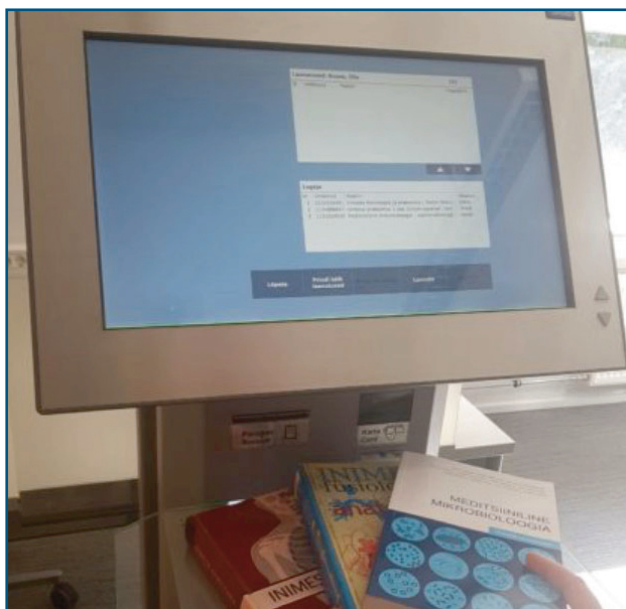


Fig. 2. Self-service borrowing machine.

Photo: Eve Poblak

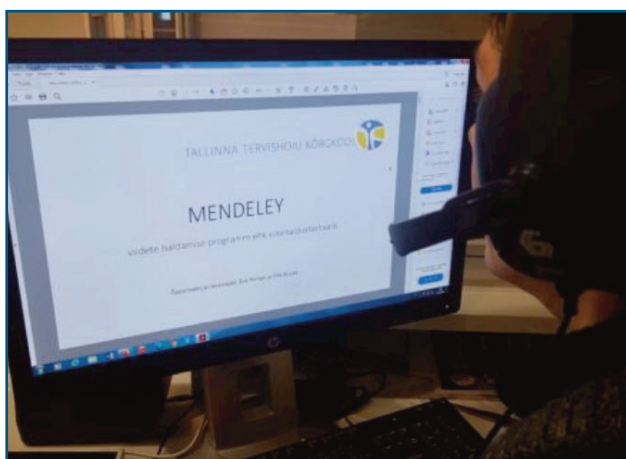


Fig. 3. In the role of a teacher.

Photo: Ülle Kuuse

It is also possible to borrow books and journals without visiting the college. For this purpose, the service of postal parcel machine has been introduced, which is handled by two employees of the library. Contactless returns are also preferred – the specially marked book locker has been in use for some time. Also, more and more borrowed items have been returned by post – both as a shipment to a postal office or to a parcel machine. The big innovation is the transition of the Tallinn study building library to the RFID system, which created a remarkable amount of additional work to the employees – new security elements had to be installed into the books and journals and the system had to be established.

The new self-service borrowing machine (based on the RFID system) currently saves a lot of time, allowing the reader to borrow several items at once (Figure 2). For those who prefer to visit library and work on-the-spot, the library of the Tallinn study building has six individual working rooms and two rooms for group work in addition to public area. Those who would like to use it, can reserve a room by themselves through the new reservation system via Internet.

### In the role of a teacher

Every year the librarians have given a lecture on library services and information search to the first-year students of the College within the subject “Introduction to Learning”. In this pandemic situation, all lectures were conducted as e-learning.

The new challenge for the librarians was to prepare and conduct part-time lectures for first-year nurses in the subject “Basics of Research I”.

The subject consisted of three major parts, conducted by a total of nine lecturers. Each librarian received one group of students (40 students).

The topics of the lectures were information search, use of statistical databases, preparation and formatting of student papers, including references based on reference management software Mendeley (Figure 3).

Thus, it was first necessary to acquire the topics, to find out how to create and conduct lectures in Zoom, and to learn to use a learning platform Moodle, where you can share information and study materials for your course and evaluate students' independent works (120 per group). Also, teaching materials, instructions and exercises had to be prepared for the students.

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The assessments of the students who successfully completed the three parts were confirmed by the librarian in the study information system Tahvel in the summary assessment protocol. Those who have not passed the subject can submit their works later individually. Latter means that in case of every new positive grade, the librarian should create a new protocol in Tahvel. The last protocol is approved at the end of the academic year.

### **In-house training**

The College also provides in-house training for the employees. The topics of trainings organized by librarians are the services provided by the library and the completion of the Estonian research information system ETIS (<https://www.etis.ee/Portal/News/Index/?IsLandingPage=true&lang=ENG>). In addition, an e-course on information retrieval has been prepared and it is also available for a fee to everyone who is interested, as a part of in-service training.

It has been necessary to manage e-resources more than ever before. For this purpose, the section E-articles was developed, it is on the library's web page in the part of e-resources, which is constantly updated with references to free-access online resources and e-articles.

The Facebook page of the library of Tallinn Health Care College (<https://www.facebook.com/tallinnaterishoiukorgkooliraamatukogu/>) was also created for transmission of information. It covers recent literature, broadcasts library information and conducts a search game "Missing Urr", where you have to find a post in which the College mascot Urr hides. A series of quizzes was launched since 2020 to introduce the library's services and information search capabilities to anyone interested in (incl. outside the College). The questions are prepared on the topics of the College, library, health care and information retrieval. The feedback for this quiz has been very good.

### **Work with ETIS**

An important part of the institution of professional higher education is research, including writing and

publishing research articles and conducting applied research. This data is reflected in ETIS. Two librarians are College's ETIS administrators. The staff of the college inserts the data of their publications that have been published in print – this data must be checked and confirmed. Data on applied research conducted at College is inserted and validated in ETIS by one librarian. For example, in 2020, 136 publications by College staff were published in journals, conference proceedings or books, and 32 applied research is currently underway.

In order to introduce applied research conducted at the College and to give ideas and experiences to colleagues, librarians organized a discussion group entitled "Using research in the study process: on the example of research conducted at Tallinn Health Care College". The purpose of the discussion was to give an overview of the research carried out, the publications published on it and their use in teaching process. In the first discussion in February 2021, the lecturer of the Chair of Nursing introduced the applied research "Research on Nursing Documentation and the Application of Research Results in the Study Process" and the lecturers of the midwifery curriculum spoke on "Challenges of Estonian Midwifery Teachers in Promoting Afghan Women's Health 2014-2022". The discussion took place in Zoom and there was a lot of interest in it. The discussion round will be held twice a year.

### **Kohtla-Järve structural unit's library**

The task of the librarian of the College's Kohtla-Järve structural unit is also to organize in-service training at the College since the autumn of 2020. Also, on-demand training for institutions and free training provided by the Ministry of Education and Research should be organized. In addition to training adults, the College has co-operation agreements with several upper secondary schools – students in the class can take elective courses in health care topics. Necessary knowledge about the information system Juhan has been acquired, where curricula are entered, new trainings are added, and participants are registered. The librarian must find the way to the right target groups through the right channels to advertise the trainings offered, communicate with the instructors and ensure that the information reaches the participants. The training can take place in the Zoom environment or on

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site. If necessary, training-related materials will be prepared. Invoices must also be compiled and issued, certificates drawn up later and feedback collected. Organizing is not effortless, e.g., for free courses, people rush to register immediately and then cancel the registration in the last minute for various reasons. Therefore, the librarian's working weeks have sometimes been seven days long – it has often been necessary to search new participants in the last minute in order to reach the required participants' number. From the autumn 2020 to the summer of 2021, more than 500 people have completed in-service trainings.

### Conclusions

During the pandemic, many services had to be taken to a new level and new skills had to be learned. Acquiring the role of a teacher and organizing in-service training has been a major challenge, but we think that we have coped well with this new situation. The work of College's librarians has also been appreciated by the library users – in a feedback survey conducted in 2020, 72% of respondents rated the quality of service as excellent and 24% as good. We think that working in the library is exciting and offers a lot of new challenges.

The Estonian Librarians Association recognized: The Action of the Year of 2021 in the professional library is the “New Challenges and Directions of the Library of Tallinn Health Care College to Support Studies at the College and the Transition to the RFID System” (Figure 4).



**Fig. 4.** The Action of the Year of 2021 in the professional library. From left: Angela Räs, Ülle Kuuse and Eve Pohlak.

Photo: Teet Malsroos.

### SUGGESTED REFERENCES AND LINKS

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