

Symposium on Types of Medical Libraries

IV. The Medical Society Library

BY MRS. GERTRUDE M. CLARK, *Librarian*

*Los Angeles County Medical Association
Los Angeles, California*

THE apparent scarcity of literature about medical society libraries may be due to the fact that they fulfill much the same function as other medical libraries. While service is primarily geared to the society member, the clientele usually also includes medical students, nurses, and research workers in allied fields.

A recent paper on the British Medical Society Library which appeared in the *BULLETIN*¹ traces the growth of the Liverpool Medical Institution Library since the 1770's. At present, the Liverpool Society Library concentrates on specialty publications, while the University of that town emphasizes basic subjects. In comparing this to a similar situation over here, we find in Los Angeles, for example, three university medical libraries and several larger hospital libraries, in addition to the collection of the Los Angeles County Medical Association, now the oldest and largest. This library makes no attempt to acquire pre-medical books or basic outlines primarily designed for the student or the nurse. In the specialties and basic medical research, it tries to cover all important material published in English. Many of its members are engaged in clinical or empirical research. The same is true of some physicians affiliated with schools or hospitals. A solution to the problem of overlapping in materials collected lies, it seems, in having the librarians of a region work together rather closely to define, as clearly as possible, where the responsibility for each individual library lies.

In thinking of the Medical Society Library as a separate species, it seemed rather pertinent to obtain some basic factual information for the country as a whole. The latest list of American and Canadian institutional members of the Medical Library Association² was checked, and when the affiliation of a particular library appeared doubtful, a questionnaire was sent. A total of sixty questionnaires was sent; replies were received from fifty-two libraries or 86 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent. Replies indicated that five libraries were inactive and that four libraries should not be considered society libraries. The remaining forty-three com-

¹ Lee, W. A. Symposium on three types of medical libraries. Pt. 2, Medical society libraries. *BULLETIN*, 41: 224-229, July 1953.

² *BULLETIN*, 42: 218-250, April 1954.

pleted questionnaires included the Los Angeles County Medical Association library.

The returns were first divided roughly according to geographic region, and libraries appear to be distributed as follows:

East.....	14
West.....	13
Mid-West.....	11
South.....	5
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	43

The returns were then analyzed; the following summarizes the findings.

1. The Librarian

As might be expected, most of the librarians are women; only eight of the libraries are administered by men, of whom six are doctors of medicine or dentistry. (One librarian stated that one of his reasons for entering the field was the preponderance of women.) Ten of the libraries replying are under the direction of non-professional or part-time librarians. Often this librarian is also responsible for other society duties; in one case, she acts as executive secretary, in another as publication manager.

The size of the staff varies from one part-time custodian to fifty-two full-time workers, the average size being five. Some libraries have to depend on volunteer help. There is almost general agreement that the library could render more and better service, but lacks sufficient staff.

2. Budget and Salaries

A surprisingly large number of libraries report on budget and salaries, information which has often in the past been considered strictly confidential. The largest library budgets are reported from Eastern libraries, the smallest from the South. Figures are not too indicative, since some libraries include rent, maintenance, and equipment, while others account only for salaries, books, and journals. In some cases, salaries are paid by other agencies. Occasionally, expenses for books and journals are not included, but listed as capital assets.

The smallest figure reported on a yearly basis is \$800, the largest \$82,000.

For salaries, too, the highest figure is reported from the East and the lowest from the South. The range for the Head Librarian, working full time, is from \$2,400 to \$11,000 per year. The average salary appears to be \$4,845; the median figure, \$4,250. Several libraries report that increases, both in salary and general budget, are under consideration. (Figures for Canadian libraries are not included.)

3. The Society

Of the libraries reporting, a majority (twenty-five) serve members of county medical associations; three serve state medical associations, and one a Parish. There are five libraries affiliated with national organizations. It was not possible to establish the exact nature of nine reporting libraries, but most of them seem to serve physicians of a geographic region, rather than of an exact political subdivision.

The size of the society's membership varies from 130 to 150,000, with the average calculated at 1,390.

It seemed interesting to ask for the date when these libraries were established.³ The oldest libraries are located in the East and the most recent collections in the West. The oldest library reporting was the Library of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia which was established in 1787. The Worcester Medical Library goes back to 1798. The King's County Library was started in Brooklyn in 1845, and two years later, the New York Academy of Medicine was founded. Another collection which has been in existence since before the Civil War is the library of the Hennepin County Medical Society in Minnesota (1856). The most recent Western library, established in 1947, serves physicians of Bernalillo County in New Mexico.

4. The Collection

A majority of the libraries are housed in the association building. Seven are located in hospitals, and three in colleges or universities. Seven of the larger libraries report separate buildings.

The size of the collection varies from 1,300 to 285,000 volumes; both the largest and the smallest collections are Eastern libraries.

Total Volumes	
Under 10,000	19
10,000-50,000	18
Over 50,000	6
	43

A few libraries do not report any subscriptions to serials. Of those reporting the range is from 16 to 2,300.

Subscriptions to Serials	
Under 100	8
100-500	25
Over 500	7
Not reported	3
	43

³ The dates stated are for the beginning of the collection, rather than date of incorporation.

Many of the libraries have special collections in subject fields such as anesthesia or tropical medicine. A majority are building up files pertaining to medical history, particularly local history and biographies of members of the society. Some of the libraries are responsible for the archives of the society, with original manuscripts and material of legal value. Other interesting historical collections on medical Americana, Herbals, Paracelsus, Harvey, and Osler are being built up by the larger and wealthier libraries. A few libraries report holdings of medical incunabula.

Many libraries have good portrait and picture files. This is particularly true of the New York Academy of Medicine Library, the largest library included, which lists 139,363 cataloged portraits and a picture file of 10,195 items. Six libraries have collections of films or other audiovisual material.

Medical instruments are held by a surprisingly large number of libraries. From our own experience, we wonder how many libraries find the time to identify, date, or catalog this material which is of great value, particularly in preparing exhibits.

Collections of catalogs from schools, publishers, and instrument manufacturers are to be found in many of the society libraries, as well as reprints, though these are usually confined to the publications of members.

5. Services Offered

Information reported regarding library hours showed that a majority offer day-time service only. Where there is a small staff, the librarian occasionally reports of the difficulty of covering long hours when staff members are ill or a position is temporarily vacant.

With most libraries reporting, this is the situation:

Library Hours	
Days only	30 libraries
2 evenings a week	5 libraries
5 evenings a week	4 libraries
1 evening a week	2 libraries
3 evenings a week	1 library

Most libraries reserve borrowing privileges for members, but will admit physicians, nurses, and medical students for reading. Many collections are open to all students, auxiliary medical personnel, educators, lawyers, research workers, and journalists. A few libraries admit every one for reading. Many libraries deliver or mail material to members. There is increasing emphasis on the service which is given over the telephone.

The following specific services are offered to members:

Bibliographies compiled	34 libraries
Help with translations	11 libraries
Literature reviews	10 libraries
Package libraries	13 libraries
Editing	10 libraries
Abstracting	5 libraries
Photostatic service	4 libraries

The Library of the College of Physicians in Philadelphia has a separate Medical Literature Service which gives very extensive service and charges a fee. Many librarians feel that services should be further extended and are working towards more adequate budgets and a larger staff.

6. Administration

Considerable interest was expressed regarding the problem of final responsibility for the administration of the library. According to the replies received, in most cases the librarian reports to a library committee, composed of three to twelve members. This is sometimes a "staggered" board with a new member elected every year. The following analysis of returns indicates to whom the librarian reports:

Library Committee	17 libraries
Board of Directors	6 libraries
Board of Trustees	4 libraries
Director of Library	3 libraries
Executive Secretary	2 libraries
Library Board & Executive Secretary	2 libraries
Editor, Scientific Publications	1 library
Hospital Pathologist	1 library

7. Special Projects

A total of eighteen libraries contribute regularly to their society publication, which frequently contains a column or page on the library. Sometimes abstracts or book reviews are prepared by the library staff. The Annual Report of the library may or may not appear in the society publication. One librarian, as previously mentioned, acts also as publication manager.

Indexes are prepared in six libraries. Four libraries are responsible for the index to the society journal. The American Medical Association Library assumes the burden, not only for preparing the indexes to its Association journal, the *J.A.M.A.*, but also for the publication of the *Quarterly Cumulative Index Medicus*, so extensively used in most medical libraries. The Bureau of

Library and Indexing Service of the American Dental Association prepares indexes to the: *Journal of the American Dental Association*, *Journal of Oral Surgery*, *Transactions of the American Dental Association*, and the *American Dental Association Newsletter*. This library is also responsible for issuing the *Index to Dental Literature in the English Language*. Other publications available from the Bureau are: *Librarians of Dental Schools*, *Editors of Dental Journals*, *Selected List of Dental Journals published in the United States*, *Dental Periodicals in Spanish and Portuguese*, *Books and Package Libraries for Dentists*, and *Audio-Visual Materials in Dentistry*.

Many libraries prepare exhibits for their reading rooms and for special occasions such as lectures, and local or national meetings.

Seven of the librarians report that they are asked to speak at membership meetings and to visiting groups.

One librarian also acts as Executive Secretary for the Association.

8. Special Rewards and Problems

Most librarians are enthusiastic about their work. "This is the most interesting position in the city" was one comment, another, "the most rewarding position I have ever held." Others mention the great variety of problems encountered, "Never two days the same."

While many librarians admit that they entered this field accidentally, they find their work most stimulating; interest in medical research, the close association with physicians who consider the librarian a colleague rather than an employee, and the appreciation of the librarian's services by the member are frequently mentioned.

The constructive aims of the library, which helps the physician, is a rewarding factor. Urgent calls may occasionally put the librarian in the race against death and disease.

Librarians also comment on the emphasis of quality, rather than quantity in reference work, and that they prefer to be in a position where reading is facilitated but does not need to be promoted. One librarian mentions the pleasant surroundings which she enjoys.

The greatest problem encountered is one probably true for all libraries: an inadequate budget, insufficient staff, too much work to be handled within an 8-hour day. When the library is open during the evening, the problems multiply. A heavy load of telephone calls sometimes make the smooth operation of the library rather difficult.

As Miss L. Margueriete Prime of the American College of Surgeons says so aptly: "Whether a reward or a problem, you are never on top of this job; it always presents a challenge."