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Medical Record Administrators and Management of the Rural Hospital Library

BY LAUREL A. HAYCOCK, *Reader Services Librarian*

DIANE J. CARROLL, *Technical Services Librarian*
Health Science Library
School of Medicine
University of Minnesota, Duluth
Duluth, Minnesota

FAYE M. KRASNER, *Director*
Medical Library
Miller-Dwan Hospital and Medical Center
Duluth, Minnesota

IN small rural communities, the primary source for biomedical literature should be the hospital library. A role of the hospital library must be to provide a well-managed collection of research materials on the local level, and to interface with the state and regional library networks. Yet "fewer than 10% of all hospitals with less than 100 beds provide information services that meet even the very minimal standards promulgated by the American Library Association, the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals, or the Department of Health, Education and Welfare" [1]. Even among hospitals that have a library, fewer than one in six is staffed by a professional librarian [2].

There are many aspects to the problem of information availability, one of which is the lack of trained library personnel. Within Minnesota, there are only thirty-seven trained librarians employed in 137 hospitals [3]. The remaining libraries are staffed by medical record administrators, medical secretaries, or other allied health personnel. In hospitals in nonmetropolitan Minnesota, 70% of the identified contact persons responsible for information services are medical record administrators [3]. Graduates from Minnesota's only medical record administration program, located at the College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, often serve in rural hospitals and are responsible for providing information services for health professionals in these rural areas. Therefore, we designed a course to prepare the medical record students for possible management of the hospital library.

In the spring of 1976, an introductory ten-hour noncredit course entitled "Hospital library management" was offered to these students at St. Scholastica by the Arrowhead Professional Libraries Association, an interlibrary loan consortium, in cooperation with the Health Science Library, University of Minnesota, Duluth. The members of the Arrowhead Professional Libraries Association participating in the program were Miller-Dwan Hospital and Medical Center, St. Mary's Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital, and the Environmental Research Laboratory.

THE COURSE

The course helped students to understand and apply the fundamental principles of hospital library management. Our emphasis was on teaching the practical knowledge necessary for the operation of a small hospital library. We omitted the theoretical orientation which is usually included in the library school curriculum. To accomplish our objectives, four major subject areas were incorporated in the five two-hour sessions: administration, acquisitions, cataloging, and reference. The administration section included discussion of policies and procedures, interlibrary cooperation, the role of the library committee, budgeting, and public relations. The second section was composed of procedures for acquisitions, binding, circulation, interlibrary loan, and compilation of statistics. Descriptive cataloging, classification systems, and reference tools were examined during the third class session. The reference section considered the mechanics of the reference interview and the methods for using

Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), *Index Medicus*, *Nursing and Allied Health Index* (formerly *Cumulative Index to Nursing Literature*), and *International Nursing Index*. In addition, a MEDLINE demonstration was featured. The last session exposed the students to a different type of special library—the scientific library at the Environmental Research Laboratory. The librarian explained federal interagency cooperation and outlined reference materials, journals, and texts unique to that institution.

Textbooks used throughout the course included: *Basic Library Management for Health Science Librarians* [4], *Handbook of Medical Library Practice* [5], and *Library Practice in Hospitals: A Basic Guide* [6].

EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two questionnaires were used as evaluation tools. One, distributed at the first class session, was designed to determine the students' background and previous exposure to medical libraries. The second questionnaire was completed by each student at the end of the course to evaluate the student's reactions and to provide feedback on each instructor's presentation.

The preliminary questionnaire showed that of ten senior students registered, half indicated they had enrolled because they believed they might need to know how to operate a library in connection with future employment. Others expressed a desire to become more familiar with the resources the library had to offer.

The questionnaire completed at the conclusion of the first course included evaluation of individual class sessions and student comments. One student suggested including as a speaker a medical record administrator who had experience in managing both a hospital library and a medical record department. Two-thirds of the students noted that their ability to use the library had improved as a result of the course, but they also indicated a need for more actual practice in the use of library materials.

Evaluation of the students' questionnaires suggested several modifications for use in planning future sessions. The first class session should include a review of basic library skills to provide a background for the study of library management. Also, more time should be allotted to the practical application of materials discussed in class. This practice could be included as a workshop during class, or offered as homework assignments. A

medical record administrator should be included as an instructor in future class sessions.

These items were incorporated when the class was offered again during the 1977 spring quarter. An additional class session was included, taught by a librarian at the College of St. Scholastica. This initial session was a review of skills necessary for effective use of an academic library. The librarian emphasized different methods for finding information, including use of the card catalog, indexes, and encyclopedias. An enthusiastic discussion about libraries, librarians, and their roles in the future created a lively atmosphere which continued throughout the course.

In each class session, after a preliminary lecture, time was spent applying techniques and answering students' questions. One worksheet was devised to demonstrate the step-by-step procedure followed in order to use *Index Medicus*. These steps included identifying the concepts in a reference request, selecting relevant MeSH terms, and using the MeSH heading to locate bibliographic citations. In another work session, the medical record administrator from Community Memorial Hospital, Cloquet, Minnesota, discussed the unique features of managing two separate departments.

DISCUSSION

Courses of this type should not be considered replacements for library science degrees, but they do serve well as interim solutions to the problem of providing trained staff for rural hospital libraries. Only a few other academic programs designed with the goal of improvement of library management skills of medical record personnel have been reported. Martin reports the development of a course planned in connection with the School of Medical Record Administration and the Library at the University of Tennessee Center for the Health Sciences [7]. This course was designed to provide instruction in the use of the library and to prepare the students for the possibility that they would be expected to manage the library in a small hospital. This course is offered as part of the regular academic program.

A training program for hospital "information assistants" has been developed at the University of Oklahoma Health Science Library [8]. The training program for hospital library personnel combines a preceptorship, an on-site consultation service, and the loan of a demonstration collection of indexes and basic monographs. A medical

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record administrator or a medical secretary participates in a two-week preceptorship consisting of discussion with a librarian preceptor and on-the-job training. Emphasis is on interlibrary loan procedures, use of the indexes, and establishment of communication patterns within the library network.

CONCLUSION

This course, "Hospital library management," offered to the medical record administration students from the College of St. Scholastica is the first of its kind to be taught in the Midwest Health Science Library Network by the members of an interlibrary loan consortium. One interesting aspect of the course was its instruction of medical record administration students in the techniques of library management prior to their employment in rural hospitals. Also, the students were exposed to a variety of library settings because we taught class sessions in our own libraries.

We feel that outreach training programs must continue in order to improve the skills of library managers in predominantly rural areas. This will lead to easier and more effective access to the

health sciences information network by rural health personnel.

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