

EDITORIAL

Celebrating the past; anticipating a bright future

The year-long recognition of the Medical Library Association's centennial by the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* through special cover art, an association history column and the special April centennial issue has been served extremely well by the inspiration and tireless efforts of Association History Editor, Carolyn E. Lipscomb. We are all in Ms. Lipscomb's debt for the selection of reprinted articles which help us to remember our illustrious, forever interesting and often funny past and for convincing a group of contemporary MLA members to write special, commissioned papers for the centennial issue.

Another group of dedicated members also worked tirelessly on behalf of MLA's centennial: the Ad Hoc Centennial Coordinating Committee chaired by Past-President June Fulton. Included among the many things the committee accomplished or coordinated was the suggestion that the editor draft a statement about the "modern-day health sciences librarian" which would form the basis of a promotional piece about the accomplishments and bright future of today's health sciences librarians. The statement is incorporated into this editorial.

We work in a profession where timely access to quality information really does make a difference in quality of care for patients and advances in biomedical research, perhaps even more in the second century of the Medical Library Association than in the first.

Inventing tomorrow: health sciences librarians in cyberspace*

Throw out your tired, old stereotypes of librarians. Those images have been wrong for decades, but especially so for health sciences li-

brarians. Your organization's Webmaster responsible for designing homepages, creating Internet links and managing a World Wide Web site may be a health sciences librarian. If you have ever encountered the terms "cybrarian," "knowledge navigator," "quality filter," or "knowledge management" chances are they were probably first used in the context of information in the health sciences. These terms describe the new roles health sciences librarians are playing in their institutions.

Quality information = quality health care

The key to understanding the passion health sciences librarians have for their profession is easy: both exceptional patient care and discoveries in biomedical research rely on timely access to a vast and growing knowledgebase of information, and librarians serve as the vital member of the health care team who can quickly find, filter, evaluate, and manage quality information. While this information still comes in familiar "containers" of books and journals, it also comes in the form of electronic databases such as the National Library of Medicine's (NLM) MEDLINE database and Web sites. Health science librarians manage the biomedical knowledgebase stored in the various contain-

ers recognizing that excellence in health is achieved through timely access to quality information.

Patients and their families are also the beneficiaries of expert assistance of health sciences librarians as they turn to librarians for assistance in locating timely and authoritative health information, including the quality information found in MEDLINE, now offered free of charge on the Web.

Technology a driving force

While computer retrieval of information sounds like today's technology, health sciences librarians could conduct automated searches of NLM's MEDLARS system in 1964! The MEDLINE bibliographic database (successor to MEDLARS) was one of the first national online databases when it became available in 1971. These early developments and more recent ones such as the Visible Human Project in which the National Library of Medicine is overseeing the creation of a complete, anatomically detailed, three-dimensional representation of the male and female human body in electronic form established a leadership role for health sciences knowledge management that continues to this day.

Online technology has been a boon to health sciences librarians who can identify and deliver essential information to their clients faster and easier, even as the information sources they access are becoming larger and farther away. Highly trained health sciences librarians can provide a competitive edge to the pharmaceutical and medical device industry dependent on locating strategic information quickly, evaluating its usefulness and using it in support of scientific or business decision-making.

* Requested by and containing significant input from the Ad Hoc Centennial Coordinating Committee: June H. Fulton, chair. Members: Eloise C. Foster, Frances Groen, Ruth Holst, Sheldon Kotzin, Lucretia W. McClure, Judith G. Robinson, Mary L. Ryan, Ada M. Seltzer. Ex-Officio members: Frieda O. Weise, chair, 1998 National Program Committee; Mark E. Funk, chair, 1999 National Program Committee; J. Michael Homan, editor, *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*; Rachael K. Anderson, president-elect; Carla J. Funk, executive director.

Health sciences librarianship

Since 1898, when four librarians and four physicians founded the Medical Library Association, health sciences librarianship has been recognized as a distinct specialty of librarianship requiring not only expertise in biomedical information, but technical expertise with online systems, databases, and computer networks such as the Internet and the Web. Today's health sciences librarian may be referred to by other descriptive titles such as database manager, Webmaster, information specialist or clinical medical librarian. All these labels relate to the key roles that health sciences librarians play in their institutions.

Celebrating 100 years—1998

The centennial year for the Medical Library Association in 1998 underscores not only the 100th birthday of the professional organization supporting and representing the health sciences librarian community, but of sustained and continuing advances in the management of knowledge benefitting all who have dedicated their lives to curing the sick and advancing the science through biomedical research.

Key references

Learn more about the Medical Library Association and health sciences librarianship through the following references and Web sites.

Medical Library Association. *MLA-NET* [Web document] Chicago: The Association, 1997. [rev. 24 Nov. 1997; cited 17 Dec. 1997] Available from Internet: www.mlanet.org.

This is the primary website of the Medical Library Association containing member information, full-text resources and links to

publications and topical interest groups and issues.

Bulletin of the Medical Library Association. Chicago: The Association, 1911–

The *BMLA* is the scholarly journal of the Medical Library Association published continuously since 1911 and available in most academic libraries in the U. S. An electronic table of contents service is available on the Web at: www.mlanet.org/bmla.html.

Medical Library Association. Code of ethics. [Web document] Chicago: The Association, 1994. [cited 17 Dec. 1997] Available from Internet: www.mlanet.org/ethics.html.

This document defines the ethical standards of health sciences librarianship.

Medical Library Association. Using scientific evidence to improve information practice: the research policy statement of the Medical Library Association. [Web document] Chicago: The Association, 1996. [cited 17 Dec. 1997] Available from Internet: www.mlanet.org/science1.html.

This document outlines MLA vision and policy regarding the conduct of research in information access, delivery and systems as a foundation for excellence in health information practice.

MLA News. Chicago: The Association, 1961–

MLA News is the monthly newsletter of the association containing news and events of interest to members. An electronic table of contents is available on the Web at www.mlanet.org/newstoc.html.

Medical Library Association. Platform for change: the educational policy statement of the Medical Library Association. [Web document] Chicago: The Association, 1991.

[cited 17 Dec. 1997] Available from Internet: www.mlanet.org/pfcindex.html.

This document outlines the challenges of providing health information education in an increasingly electronic world and defines the competencies required of health sciences librarian practitioners.

Medical Library Association. Academy of Health Information Professionals. [Web document] Chicago: The Association, nd. [cited 17 Dec. 1997] Available from Internet: www.meddean.luc.edu/lumen/library/mla/main.html.

This Web site describes the credentialing program of the Medical Library Association and the requirements of membership in the Academy at various professional levels including provisional member, member, senior member, and distinguished member.

National Library of Medicine. [Web document] Bethesda, MD: U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, 1997. [rev. 4 Dec. 1997; cited 17 Dec. 1997] Available from Internet: www.nlm.nih.gov.

This World Wide Web site provides access to a variety of National Library of Medicine programs and services including:

PubMed (www.nlm.nih.gov/databases/freemed1.html) Free access to the MEDLINE database worldwide.

Visible Human Project (www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html) Provides a description of the project and information on access.

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