
Symposium

The Hospital Health Sciences Library: Challenges and Future Directions

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Introduction

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ALTHOUGH the hospital has always been considered a complex organization, it is further complicated by sweeping changes influencing health care delivery in the 1980s. Goldsmith in *Can Hospitals Survive?* sees inpatient hospital services as a rapidly maturing market that is entering a "new phase of intense market competition" [1]. Some predictions indicate that 1,000 hospitals will close by the year 2000 [2]. The hospital that once existed as a service organization supported by a philosophy of charity is becoming a for-profit organization, and it is being forced to compete with other types of health providers in order to survive.

In the past, one of the key differences in general industry between for-profit and not-for-profit corporations was the for-profit's ability to manage information in order to assure its availability for rapid decision making. The ability to respond rapidly within a changing environment is now considered crucial by all hospitals. Information is being recognized as a corporate asset.

Traditionally, the hospital library has been viewed as a non-revenue-producing department of the hospital that existed predominantly to provide materials to the medical staff for patient care or teaching. Only in the last twenty years has its target audience been expanded to include all hospital staff. Only in the last ten years have hospital librarians begun to talk more about a *service center* rather than a *storage center*. The hospital will change radically during the next ten years, and so will the department on which it relies as a source of information for decision making. In this symposium we hold the view that the focus of hospital librarians must change from a passive "input" orientation to result or "output" orientation.

The role of hospital libraries has not always been recognized or rewarded, which has led to proposals by the Health Care Financing Administration to delete the hospital library requirement as a condition for participation in Medicare programs [3]. Lorenzi, in an editorial in the *Bulletin*, asked, "How did we librarians come under such a harsh attack?" [4]. I would contend that in the past,

managers of hospital library departments have not taken the risks that are needed in order to expand into new services and to gain support and recognition for the department's value to the hospital. Tversky, a psychologist from Stanford University, has argued that we have a tendency to avoid risks when seeking gains but to accept risks in order to avoid losses [5]. Now that hospital librarians are being challenged to prove the value of information services to the hospital, they should be more willing to take risks in order to avoid losses.

This symposium is not designed to address the "how to do it" in hospital library practice. Current practices have been fully detailed in the new MLA publication *Hospital Library Management* [6]. Rather, this symposium will discuss changes. It is structured to review our antecedents, to analyze the critical issues facing today's hospital librarians, and to look at future directions. *Kiplinger Washington Letter* identified health care, computing, and communications as among the U.S. markets involved in the most change and growing at the greatest rate [7]. The health sciences librarian, positioned across all three, should recognize the opportunities and be willing to take the risks to effect the changes.

Contributors to this symposium come from a wide variety of settings: hospital sizes range from 200 to 1,000 beds and the department staffs range from one to eight persons. Two authors, although from academic environments, were instrumental in the development of the 1982 hospital library survey sponsored by the Kentucky-Ohio-Michigan Regional Medical Library Network [8]. The history of libraries in hospitals by Wolfgram provides a background analysis; Van Toll and Calhoun analyze data from surveys on the growth of library services. Hardy and co-authors discuss critical issues facing hospital library managers today: evaluating the effect of the library on the quality and cost of medical care. The future of hospital libraries is addressed in the last two papers. The hospital library within the information management context of its parent institution is considered

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by Buchanan and Fazzino. Finally, the symposium concludes with a look at the myriad directions available to the library department, based on the environment of each hospital. These paths are outlined by Reel, and as she indicates, the opportunities are vast.

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