

# Health Information News and Thinking

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## Inside

Review of past events 2

Websites/Services of Interest 2

Feature Article cont. 3

People on the move 3

Current Literature/ Book review 4

News from the group 4

## Dangerous Illusions! Needs and Requirements for a Health Science Librarian in 2003 and beyond.

As Health Science Librarians, we've noticed a great change in the professional literature over the last few years, when it comes to discussing our area of the profession. In this brief article, I'd like to highlight some of the challenges that we face in the future. Although the emphasis and examples are drawn from the Health Science sector of the profession, it may be that there are parallels, which can be reflected in other sectors as well.

The most significant challenge is to realise that the focus is not on the library, or the physical space that the library occupies. Rather, it is on the Librarian, and the skills that a Librarian requires. Indeed, this is to put it mildly. It's not just about what skills we require. It's about the skills we require if Librarianship as a profession is to survive, and not be subsumed into a plethora of new information roles that are beginning to emerge. For example, have a look at some of these:

*Information Scientist*  
*Information Researcher*  
*Knowledge Manager*  
*Librarian and Research Officer*  
*Medical Knowledge Architect*  
*Information Specialist*  
*Medical Information Researcher*  
*Health Informatics Officer*  
*Information Officer*  
*Informationist.*

Believe me, there are no illusions here – these are job titles that have all been advertised or claimed within the last 18

months both here and in the UK. If that's not enough, just how important is a professional qualification any more. Only in the last few days, a despairing member of staff in a library I used to work for in London, called me to tell me, that my post is now held by a solicitor who is "interested" in information management. The new post holder concentrates on information management, and leaves the other two members of staff to look after the library – she no longer has the time!

So when as Health Science Librarians we hear the traditional doctrine being reaffirmed of:

- Providing a service
- Supporting our users
- Acting as intermediaries

It's tempting to start throwing bottles and heavy objects out of windows, but being aware of the health and safety implications, we usually manage to restrain ourselves! It's not that there is anything wrong with these ideals, or that they are not noble ones. It's simply that they are no longer adequate, and by casting ourselves in a purely supporting role, as may be evident from the above, we are in great danger of doing ourselves a grave disservice.

So, how do we change this?

**"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' John 3:7**

A number of us in the sector have been discussing these

issues over the last few months, and reflecting on our own roles, and as we do so, it's becoming clearer and clearer, that as Librarians, we need to start again – much of what we are taught in our degrees or post graduate courses is of little or no use to us in the roles that we are increasingly being called to in the profession. The only constant, as in so many other professions is change, and this, plus the acquisition of new skills, is the only way to continually validate our profession, and the Health Sciences sector.

So, if we are to be born anew, where do we start, what do we need, and what should we expect?

First on my list, is the need for us to be taught philosophic logic, and the art of logical thinking. I was not taught this as a Librarian, but as part of another degree. I would not say either that I was the best exponent of it, but it has possibly been the most useful thing I have ever learnt. As Health Science Librarians, we urgently, if not desperately, need the ability to be not just able to present a reasoned argument, but perhaps more importantly, to get behind the logic and reasoning of other peoples arguments. This is not always as easy as it seems. But in the realm of medical research, the art of critical appraisal, a skill which we are increasingly being called upon to perform, demands the application of a

(Continued on page 3)

## Websites/ services of interest

### 1. PubCrawler - an Update Alerting Service for PubMed and GenBank

<http://pubcrawler.gen.tcd.ie/>

**PubCrawler** is a free "alerting" service that scans **daily updates** to the NCBI Medline (PubMed) and GenBank databases. PubCrawler can keep scientists informed of the **current contents** of Medline and GenBank, by listing new database entries that match their research interests.

### 2. Evaluating Medical Information on the Internet: How Good Are Your Sources?

<http://www.aarp.org/health/Articles/a2003-03-17-wwwhealth.html>

This AARP site offers general rules to follow for evaluating the quality of medical information on the Internet. The site provides a checklist of the things you should know about judging the information on the Internet as well as providing a series of links to other online informational resources.

### 3. The Merck Manual of Medical Information - Home Edition

<http://www.merckhomeedition.com/home.html>

The Merck Manual of Medical Information--Home Edition has been published to meet a growing demand by the general public for highly detailed, sophisticated medical information. This book is based almost entirely on the text of The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy, commonly referred to as The Merck Manual. First published in 1899, The Merck Manual is the oldest continuously published general medical textbook in the English language and the most widely used medical textbook in the world. It covers almost every disease that affects humans in specialties such as pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, psychiatry, ophthalmology, otolaryngology, dermatology, and dentistry, and special situations such as burns, heat disorders, radiation reactions and injuries and sports injuries. No other medical textbook covers as wide a range of disorders.

### 4. Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)

<http://www.mlanet.org/publications/jmla/index.html>

The Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA), formerly known as the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association (BMLA) is an international, peer-reviewed journal published quarterly that aims to advance the practice and research knowledgebase of health sciences librarianship.

Full-text for issues January 2000--present  
Digital archives of the BMLA, vols. 88 and 89, and the JMLA on PubMed Central.  
<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/tocrender.fcgi?journal=93>

## Review of past events

# The Library as a Centre of Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*Library Association of Ireland and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (Northern Ireland) Annual Joint Conference, Galway Bay Hotel, 29.04.'03 – 02.05.'03*

I wish to thank the Irish Health Sciences Libraries Section of the Library Association of Ireland for giving me the opportunity to attend this conference recently. It was interesting and thought-provoking and provided a good insight into the topics that are being discussed in the worlds of public, academic and special librarianship in 2003.

The presentation that stands out most in my mind was "Creating Library Spaces: Libraries 2040" by Rob Bruijnzeels, Head of the Policy Unit, Netherlands Public Library Association, the Hague. It was an imaginative presentation which provided 7 possible scenarios of the new future libraries that will have replaced the traditional library by 2040 in the opinion of the author. Mr Bruijnzeels put forward the theory that although books will still be around in 2040, the traditional library will not. One of the scenarios which caught my imagination was the design of the endless interior of the Brabant Library in Eindhoven which would consist of a 230m tall tower enclosing 17 kilometres of alphabetically sequenced bookcases. The rationale behind the Brabant Library is that the current public library system in the Netherlands (and probably elsewhere also) is no longer able to cope with the enormous production of books and also the fact that increasing urbanisation and population density have brought about different types of demands for information. The Brabant Library would be a metalibrary in which there would be room for about 5 million books, thousands of magazines, terminals, reading/study rooms, Internet cafes and numerous other amenities. Along with traditional lifts and staircases there would be about 800 glass study booths with the ability to move vertically as well as horizontally on the outside of the spiral structure as well as on the inside. This would make it possible to navigate the whole collection from one's own private booth. Some of the booths would serve as meeting kiosks or mini-lounges and a navigation system for the booths would prevent collisions.

The Brabant Library would be the central location for all library functions of the province with collections which would be directly accessible 24/7 and 365 days a year. The library would service all kinds of decentralised branches and the idea is that by 2040 local libraries in this part of the Netherlands will exist as small exclusive collections in modern meeting places such as local cafes, dentists' waiting rooms, railway and petrol stations, schools, hotels and city halls.

Even though the Brabant Library is still but an architectural drawing by Winy Maas, it certainly provides food for thought on the shape of libraries to come!

Other presentations during the conference which were of interest included the address by Kay Raseroka, President-Elect of IFLA and University Librarian at the University of Botswana. The theme of this presentation was that of life-long literacy where the library is "a unique space nurturing freedom of thought and expression, a Trojan horse through which the collective wisdom of society is provided and librarians are knowledgeable facilitators of access to information" for users. Our task should be according to

Ms. Raseroka to empower information users and ourselves in a changing world and to live up to the core values we all subscribe to including freedom, equity of access to ideas and works of the imagination and freedom of expression. The challenge for librarians she feels is to hold on to this vision and to work hard at the processes we require to help us become people who facilitate information literacy.

The parallel sessions which included a presentation by Bernard Barrett, Information Scientist, Mid-Western Health Board and Maureen Dwyer, Librarian, Royal College of Nursing, Northern Ireland, were directly relevant to library and information professionals working in the healthcare arena.

Bernard's presentation "Dangerous Illusions! Needs and Requirements for a Health Science Librarian in 2003 and beyond" suggested further areas that Library and Information Studies courses should cover in order to assist us to deal effectively with the challenges we face in our own particular sector. These include logic, subject specialisation, educational and human psychology, adult learning theory and teaching techniques, relevant IT and web authoring skills, advanced communication and presentation skills, management theory, research skills and knowledge of how to undertake statistical analysis, systematic reviews and health technology assessments.

Maureen's presentation entitled "Rethinking the way we do business" provided us with a case study of knowledge management within the Royal College of Nursing (RCN). She described the development of an Information Strategy for the organisation with 340,000 members between the UK and Northern Ireland. The process involved cross-departmental working and a process of change management to achieve the shared vision of the RCN Information Strategy and the resulting development of a Learning Zone and access to relevant online resources for staff and students from the organisation's web site. This presentation was of particular interest in terms of providing ideas for collaborative e-library projects which is topical in Irish Healthcare Libraries at the present time.

In conclusion, this year's conference had a little for everybody with the main emphasis on the broader philosophical questions around why libraries exist and what our core values and focus should be. It was a great opportunity to meet current and former colleagues and to gain new insights into some of the bigger questions while also providing some practical sessions of direct relevance to our own area of specialisation.

*Catherine Kennedy  
Information Scientist  
National Institute of Health Sciences  
St. Camillus Hospital  
Shelbourne Road  
Limerick*

# Dangerous Illusions *(continued from page 1)*

well trained mind, able to use deductive logic, and critically assess information from a variety of different angles.

Second is the need, to accept that we will have to cultivate a degree of subject specialisation. To some extent, within academic library circles, this has already happened, in the form of subject librarians. However, in medical libraries, it simply is not possible to be all things to all people, which is the situation that faces many of us. We need to have an in-depth knowledge of the areas in which we work, and I mean in-depth. It's not enough to know that ECT is short for Electro Convulsive Therapy and to have some idea of where information is available. We need to be steeped in the literature, and to be able to understand, talk, and perhaps even study with health care professionals on a basis of equality. We need to be considered critical members of the health care team

This means, of course, that a three-year mixed degree, or a one-year postgraduate cram course is nowhere near enough. Many health care professionals can study for up to nine years, interspersed with practice, and the absolute requirement to engage in continuing professional development. If we aspire to collaboration with health care professionals, then this is what we have to consider, and the sooner the colleges and universities that offer library and information courses realise this, the healthier our sector in the profession will be.

Third, and before you accuse me of hallucinating and needing medical treatment myself, what then will all Health Science Librarians need to study if they are to meet the challenge in the next three years?

- We need to train in adult learning theory and teaching techniques (some posts now actually ask for a teaching qualification, and training/teaching users is now a central component of our job)
- We will be skilled in IT and database management (which means having the relevant certification)
- We will be expert in web design and content editing
- We will be skilled communicators and presenters (if we are to teach, and persuade others of the necessity

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*John 3:7*

of what we do) how else – perhaps this means having knowledge of management theory, together with psychology and organisational dynamics.

- We need to be skilled researchers, possessing an awareness of different research methodologies
- We need to know how to undertake statistical analysis.
- We need to be confident and capable of producing systematic reviews, and health technology assessments.

And once we start thinking and reflecting on this, I think you'll see that this is just the beginning.

But this is where Health Science Librarianship is going.

Here in Ireland, as in the UK, it's no illusion. Where I work for the Mid Western Health Board, my post has involved research into the production of clinical guidelines, which will have a direct impact on the services the Health Board provides. This has meant possessing a very clear understanding of what is happening in other countries, and of concepts such as Clinical Governance. The post has also involved training and having to relate to health care professionals in a number of different contexts and scenarios. I'm not saying that this is what everyone should be doing. However, these are skills which we are not taught, yet are increasingly being expected to possess.

For Health Science Librarians, these are therefore critical times. We can pretend it's all an illusion, and attempt to continue in the mould in which we have been trained. If we do so, we are likely to be marginalized and become increasingly irrelevant within the organisations in which we work. If we rise to the challenge, it won't be easy either, and it's going to mean quite a lot of hard work and learning – but without it we will live in a world of dangerous illusions!

**Bernard Barrett**, *Chairman of the IHSLG Committee. From a presentation made at the LAI/CILIP Conference, Galway, 1st May 2003.*  
bbarrett@mwhb.ie

## People on the move

- *Aoife O'Connor took up the position of Assistant Librarian at the Rotunda Hospital Library in August 2003 replacing Jean Ryan who worked at the Rotunda for 4 years. Jean has moved to the position of Clinical Librarian at Conwy & Denbighshire NHS Trust. Welcome to Aoife and the best of luck and thanks to Jean from Helen Delaney, Librarian, Rotunda Hospital Library, Dublin 1.*
- *Kathryn Smith will be replacing Niamh O'Sullivan as Research Officer/ Librarian with the Irish Blood Transfusion Service for a six month period beginning mid Oct 2003.*



## Current Literature/ Book Review



### LITERATURE SEARCHING: A USER GUIDE

(December 2002)

A new publication on literature searching has just been produced by the Library & Information Services at the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP).

#### Contents include:

What a literature search is, why search the literature, sources of information including libraries, electronic databases, journals, books, grey literature, the web, how to conduct a literature search including search techniques, searching for evidence, managing information and referencing.

**It is available in full text for free on the CSP website**  
<http://www.csp.org.uk/libraryandinformation/publications/view.cfm?id=258>

Print copies are also available at £10 each. Available from Terry Grant, Clerical Assistant, Research & Clinical Effectiveness Unit, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, 14 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4ED. Cheques should be made payable to the 'Chartered Society of Physiotherapy'.

### SUCCESS AT THE ENQUIRY DESK: SUCCESSFUL ENQUIRY ANSWERING - EVERY TIME

By Tim Buckley Owen

(March 2003; Paperback: 1-85604-477-7; £14.95)

The fourth edition of *Success at the Enquiry Desk* is designed to help the information professional become self-sufficient in answering enquiries. Step by step, it guides the reader

through all the stages of research, from finding out what the enquirer really wants, to providing a value-added answer.

Contents pages at <http://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/110contents.pdf>

Sample chapter at <http://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/110.pdf>

The book is equally effective in large or small libraries and information units as the emphasis is on how to make the best use of limited resources. It includes the author's list of 25 multi-purpose reference sources and the Success at the Enquiry Desk enquiry form, which matches the book's step-by-step approach to enquiry answering.

This fully revised and expanded fourth edition offers further advice on when to use and when not to use the internet, how to deal with information overload, and how to add value to answers by presenting them effectively. It also has a brand new chapter: 'Sign-off: what can we learn from this enquiry?' which looks at how new sources can be exploited to develop the information service still further.

Further information may be obtained from:

Mark O'Loughlin  
 Marketing Executive  
 Facet Publishing, 7 Ridgmount Street, London, WC1E 7AE  
 Direct Tel: +(0)20 7255 0597  
 E-mail: [mark.o'loughlin@facetpublishing.co.uk](mailto:mark.o'loughlin@facetpublishing.co.uk)



## News from the group

Congratulations to Dympna Lynch, Librarian, Cavan General Hospital and her husband Chris on the birth of their first child, Daithí. Best wishes from Jean, Linda and all the Library staff in the North Eastern Health Board.

Congratulations to Nicola Fay, Regional Librarian, Midland Health Board and her husband Conor, on the birth of their new daughter Eva Kay in the early morning of the 22nd September 2003. Very best wishes to all.

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This first issue was edited by Niamh O'Sullivan, Research Officer/ Librarian, Irish Blood Transfusion Service and designed by Emma Quinn, Librarian, Waterford Regional Hospital.

Any submissions for future articles should be sent/faxed/emailed to: Emma Quinn, Librarian, Waterford Regional Hospital, Dunmore Road, Waterford. Tel. +353 (0)51 842434. Fax: +353 (0)51 848561. Email: [QuinnEM@Sehb.ie](mailto:QuinnEM@Sehb.ie)





