



HSLG VIRTUAL JOURNAL CLUB

CAITRÍONA LEE

HEALTH RESEARCH BOARD

APRIL 2026

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Ross-White, Amanda

**Search is a verb: systematic review searching as
invisible labor**

J Med Libr Assoc 2021;109, 505–506

<https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2021.1226>

BACKGROUND

- **My background:** ~10 years as a hospital librarian, ~9 years as an information specialist.
- **My interest:** perceptions of literature search work: by librarians, by researchers, by publishers
- **The author: Amanda Ross-White**, Queens University Library, Ontario <https://library.queensu.ca/about/staff/amanda-ross-white>

RECAP OF THE ARTICLE

- What is invisible labour?
- Invisible labour and library work
- Search descriptions in library work
 - ICMJE descriptions and authorship
 - Search descriptions: action/passive verbs, nouns

CONTEXT

- Complexity of literature search work is increasing
- Irish health science librarians are to the fore in skill-building and skill-sharing in literature search methods
- Recognition: are health librarians, including Irish librarians, getting fair recognition for their professional labour and skills?

PERCEPTIONS OF LITERATURE SEARCH

- Literature searching involves a range of competencies: technical skills, subject knowledge, data management.
- Yet in many published literature reviews, the searches are done by “a **hospital librarian**”, “an **experienced health sciences librarian**”, or “a **medical librarian**” – no name, no affiliation and no authorship or named acknowledgement.

IMPLICATIONS

- **Research support staff versus Research partners**
- Implications for professional development and promotion
- Implications for assessing the value of a health library and its staff

LET'S TALK!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS I

What aspects of literature search-related work, if any, are invisible, erased or undervalued in our own HSLG librarianship work?

Potential examples: Reference interviews; researching, planning and conducting searches – alone or with researchers; data management of results; write-up/documentation; management of search results; search methods training

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS II

Health librarianship work is specialist professional work.

Is it recognised as such in general? In the Irish context?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS III

If our search work is perceived as basic or simple, how are we placed with regard to AI? Is professional search work at risk of being replaced with cheaper, less rigorous AI search if it is 'invisible' work?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS IV

Are there times when the librarian may not want to be credited with a literature search, re authorship or acknowledgements?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS V

Librarianship is not a vocation (or not only a vocation): it's a job, it is professional work. Does the perception of library work as a noble vocation contribute to or enable its invisibility?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS VI

Posts where the majority of workers are female, such as librarianship posts, have often been under-recognised as professional – has this changed in the past decades?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS VII

Are there practical things we can do to ensure that our work is recognised as complex, intellectual, rigorous work, that our organisations and professional ecosystems value health librarianship appropriately, and that we remain visible as a profession?

BACKGROUND READING I

- Brunskill, A., Hanneke, R., 2022. The case of the disappearing librarians: analyzing documentation of librarians' contributions to systematic reviews. *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 110, 409–418. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2022.1505>
- Clarke, R.I., Stanton, K.L., Grimm, A., Zhang, B., 2022. Invisible labor, invisible value: unpacking traditional assessment of academic library value. *College & Research Libraries* 83, 926–945. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.83.6.926>
- Hanell, F., Ahlryd, S., 2023. Information work of hospital librarians: Making the invisible visible. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 55, 70–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006211063202>

BACKGROUND READING II

- Bloss, J.E., Sewell, K., Schellinger, J., Haberstroh, A., 2022. Health sciences and medical librarians conducting research and their experiences asking for co-authorship. J Med Libr Assoc 110, 449–462. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2022.1485>
- Townsend, W.A., Anderson, P.F., Ginier, E.C., MacEachern, M.P., Saylor, K.M., Shipman, B.L., Smith, J.E., 2017. A competency framework for librarians involved in systematic reviews. J Med Libr Assoc 105, 268–275. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2017.189>
- Ettarh, F., 2018. Vocational awe and librarianship: the lies we tell ourselves. In the Library with the Lead Pipe. <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>

BACKGROUND READING III

- Harrison, J., Creaser, C., Greenwood, H., 2013. The status of health librarianship and libraries in the Republic of Ireland (SHELLI): a mixed methods review to inform future strategy and sustainability. Health Information & Libraries Journal 30, 92–109.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12030>
- Lawton, A., Burns, J., 2015. A review of competencies needed for health librarians – a comparison of Irish and international practice. Health Information & Libraries Journal 32, 84–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12093>
- Lawton, A., 2015. The invisible librarian: a librarian's guide to increasing visibility and impact. Amsterdam, [Netherlands]; Chandos Publishing.

BACKGROUND READING IV

- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, 2026. Recommendations. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors.
<https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>
- Alpi, K.M., Akers, K.G., 2021. CRediT for authors of articles published in the Journal of the Medical Library Association. J Med Libr Assoc 109, 362–364.
<https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2021.1294>
- CABI Digital Library, 2026. searchRxiv – Home.
<https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/journal/searchrxiv>