A Student Perspective of the Midwest Chapter Meeting of the Medical Library Association

By Emilie Vrbancic

Shortly before attending the Midwest Chapter Meeting, I read “The Evolving Role and Value of Libraries and Librarians in Health Care”, featured in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Detailed in this article are the various activities health sciences librarians are taking to meet the increasing demands for evidence-based health information. The report highlighted the real and actual need for libraries and librarians who can provide reliable health information for a variety of users including patients, consumers, and health professionals. I, like many others, was delighted to read such a positive portrait of health sciences librarianship and the article renewed my confidence in choosing medical librarianship as the focus of my future library career. The article gave me insight into the differing and ever more relevant roles librarians can play in all parts of health care. In particular, I was intrigued to read about clinical librarians and the positive effect they have on obtaining answers to clinical questions during hospital rounds.

Seeming to confirm the prediction that librarians are indispensable to the health care system, the participants in the Midwest Chapter Meeting exceeded the expected and forecasted roles of medical librarians highlighted in the aforementioned article. This being my first MLA meeting of any kind, I was introduced to the wide ranging roles medical librarians serve; from outreach librarians to embedded librarians who travel along with first responder teams. I was particularly pleased to be counted among the many representatives from the Library of the Health Sciences. The accounts of the innovative ways LHS librarians are staying relevant to the changing demands of library users proved the Library of the Health Sciences role as a leader in the field.

In all, LHS librarians participated in panel presentations, poster presentations as well as lightening talks during the Health Information Summit. Ryan Rafferty presented *Library Instruction and First-year Medical Students* which detailed the assessment of library instruction to Introduction to Human Disease first year medical students. Abigail Goben and Rebecca Raszewski presented *Fording the Data Stream* in which they shared their experiences in creating an electronic data recording system for reference transactions as well as highlighted the challenges and benefits of working with big data.

Kelly O’Brien presented her poster, *An Initial Assessment of the Availability of Career Information to Young People in Rural Illinois* in which she detailed survey results of rural
Southern Illinois public and high school libraries. The results assessed not only the availability of career resources to young people, but librarians’ perception of their roles and responsibilities in connecting young people to career information. What Affects The Use of Virtual Reference Services? presented by Ryan Rafferty depicted the primary stages of investigating the connection between the total number of electronic virtual reference questions and the ease of accessing virtual reference pages, FTE staff, and hours of virtual reference operation. Results showed the average number of clicks to send an email and IM question as well the varying hours of operation of virtual reference from 105 libraries. Rebecca Raszewski presented a large scale survey of libraries’ nursing collections with the poster, Using the ICIRN Essential Nursing Resources List to Evaluate Libraries’ Collections. Her results showed the similarities and surprising differences between the 200 sample collections of free and subscription based resources from a variety of health sciences libraries.

During the Health Information Summit, which closed the conference program, medical librarians presented lightning talks in which they shared their unique experiences from a variety of specialties. Cleo Pappas and Maureen Clark gave an illuminating talk about the inception and success of their roles as clinical librarians at UIC hospital departments. Abigail Goben informed us of her efforts to boost the relevancy of the dentistry liaison position by increasing her instruction to dentistry students and also by holding office hours outside of the library in order to better serve dentistry faculty and students.

Not only did I leave the Midwest Chapter Meeting with a new understanding of the career possibilities I can achieve by continuing on as a health sciences librarian after I graduate, I came away with a greater appreciation of the innovative work generated by UIC librarians. I have begun to integrate myself into more projects that push the boundaries of traditional librarianship and have bigger ideas of what I am capable of contributing to the Library of the Health Sciences and the field itself.

Emilie Vrbancic
Graduate Assistant
Library of the Health Sciences-Urbana
evrbanc2@illinois.edu