



# Medical Librarians Can Help Providers Improve Clinical Decision-Making and Education

Joseph R. Hageman, MD

One of my favorite places to spend time since I was a young boy is in the library. This activity has continued as an adult in my personal and professional life. Some of my favorite people are librarians who work in hospitals and in medical schools. What medical providers may not be aware of is what it takes to become a medical librarian and what an asset they can be in terms of improving the care of our patients.

“Medical librarians are an integral part of the health care team. They have a direct impact on the quality of patient care, by helping physicians,

allied health professionals and researchers to stay abreast of new developments in their specialty areas. They also work closely with patients and consumers who are seeking authoritative health information.”<sup>1</sup> Medical librarians come with varied educational backgrounds and work experience as illustrated in this summary. “Medical librarians are specialized in using databases and reference materials to conduct research for medical information. They can work in medical school libraries, corporations, nonprofit organizations or government agencies. Medical librarians commonly have training in the sciences, health, or medicine. They might also be trained in the information sciences to acquire the skills needed to maintain databases.”<sup>2</sup>

At the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago where I trained, the medical librarian would attend the resident morning report sessions and, in some cases, they would go on rounds with the clinical team (embedded librarian or clinical medical librarian<sup>3</sup>). I have spent a lot of time in the medical library as a medical student, a pediatric resident, neonatology fellow, and as an attending pediatrician. Librarians are helpful in

providing current and historical clinical references for the better care of patients.

## HOW DO MEDICAL LIBRARIANS HELP IMPROVE PATIENT CARE?

Cooper and Crum<sup>3</sup> describe librarians as having active roles in medical education as well as in clinical and basic science research—they are essentially members of the team, an “embedded librarian or liaison.” The clinical medical librarian (or embedded liaison) play a combination of roles, each a bit different. Clinically, they provide current clinical papers to medical professionals practicing in an evidence-based manner.<sup>3</sup> Further, if a physician designs a quality improvement project, which is designed to improve care, and the team chooses one or several results to be measured, the librarian can document those particular outcomes. Health information librarians are also active in grant development, data management, and in the preparation of systematic reviews.<sup>3-6</sup>

The role of health information librarians in education and clinical decision-making were examined in a web-based survey of physicians, residents, and nurses serving 118 hospitals.<sup>5</sup> In this survey of 16,122 respondents, three-fourths stated that they *definitely* or *probably*

---

*Pediatric Annals* Editor-in-Chief Joseph R. Hageman, MD, is the Director of Quality Improvement, Section of Neonatology, Comer Children’s Hospital; a Senior Clinician Educator, The University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine; and an Emeritus Attending Pediatrician, NorthShore University HealthSystem.

Address correspondence to Joseph R. Hageman, MD, via email: pedann@Healio.com.

Acknowledgment: I thank Linda Feinberg, MSLS, and Ruth Humphrey, MSLS, for their thoughtful review and contributions to this editorial; both are affiliated with Evanston Hospital (NorthShore University HealthSystem).

doi:10.3928/19382359-20190116-01

handled aspects of a patient care situation differently as a result of information provided by medical librarians; changes included advice to the patient, diagnosis, and choice of drugs. A total of 95% of the respondents said the information resulted in a better-informed clinical decision.<sup>6</sup> With respect to the quality of medical education for residents and attending physicians, studies document<sup>4,6</sup> self-reported improvement in knowledge when articles/research were provided by a medical librarian.

Medical librarians provide a needed resource to medical students, residents, attending physicians, physician researchers, and other health practitioners in hospital and academic settings.

They provide reference services as well as document delivery, keep current health care resources, and work behind the scene with publishers, vendors, and the information technology departments to keep subscriptions to journals and books, as well as to keep software running smoothly. With these various duties and responsibilities, the medical librarian can help to improve the quality of patient care.

## REFERENCES

1. ExploreHealthCareers. Medical librarian. <https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/arts-and-humanities-in-health/medical-librarian/>. Accessed January 16, 2019.
2. Medical librarian: job description, outlook and requirements. [https://study.com/articles/Medical\\_Librarian\\_Job\\_Description\\_Outlook\\_and\\_Requirements.html](https://study.com/articles/Medical_Librarian_Job_Description_Outlook_and_Requirements.html). Accessed January 16, 2019.
3. Cooper ID, Crum JA. New activities and changing roles of health sciences librarians: a systematic review, 1990-2012. *J Med Lib Assoc.* 2013;101(4):268-277. doi:10.3163/1536-5050.101.4.008.
4. Sollenberger JF, Holloway RG Jr. The evolving role and value of libraries and librarians in healthcare. *JAMA.* 2013;310(12):1231-1232. doi:10.1001/jama.2013.277050.
5. Banks DE, Shi R, Timm DF, et al. Decreased length of stay associated with presentation of cases at morning report with librarian support. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2007;95(4):381-387. doi:10.3163/1536-5050.95.4.381.
6. Marshall JG, Sollenberger J, Easterly-Gannett S, et al. The value of library and information services in patient care: results of a multi-center study. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2013;101(1):38-46. doi:10.3163/1536-5050.101.1.007.