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## Bringing back the librarian, Part two

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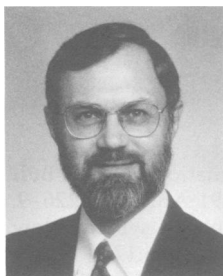
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## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

### Bringing back the librarian, part two



In this second of my President's Pages for the *Bulletin*, I address the role of the Medical Library Association (MLA) in its education,

professional development, and professional recognition roles for the librarian. The issue, as I stated in the first article in this series, is to refocus our energies toward Goal II of the association's strategic plan, toward the role of the information services professional [1]. In the first article, I recounted the ways the association was enhancing the professional role of the librarian as it relates to Goal II, the provision of information services and educational programs, through three of its advocacy committees: the Governmental Relations Committee, the Publishing and Information Industries Relations Committee, and the Status and Economic Interests of Health Sciences Library Personnel Committee. In this article, I will cover the activities of four committees involved in education, professional development, and professional recognition.

I asked the chairs of these committees to consider from their perspective what the association could do in its education, professional development, and professional recognition roles to enhance the role of the librarian as it relates to Goal II.

Mary Ann Hoffman, 1991/92 chairman, responded for the Awards Committee.

The Awards Committee is very interested in Goal II of the strategic plan, especially since the awardees are selected from the pool of those members that demonstrate leadership in professional excellence. Objective A.7. of this goal ("recognize professional excel-

lence in the creation and provision of information services and educational programs") and Objective B.3. ("provide a forum for the advancement of state-of-the-art knowledge in the creation and provision of information services and educational programs") speak directly to the Awards Committee and its various juries. The accomplishment of Goal II can only improve services to the users and clients of our libraries. At the same time, it will redefine and strengthen the roles of the medical librarians and their libraries within their institutions, the community, and nationally. It is my perception that it is generally the very active and/or the older members who recognize the significance of the various awards. The committee would like to put a greater emphasis on the awards [2].

The chairman of the Awards Committee believes in the efficacy of awards to further the professional role of the librarian. She believes that a greater emphasis placed on interactions with awardees through forums, interviews, or special luncheons, for example, where awardees are featured and others are given the opportunity to communicate directly with them, offer the possibility of further enhancing the already positive effects of the awards programs.

The Grants and Scholarship Committee can be a significant force in strengthening the role of the librarian as it relates to Goal II. Janet Minnerath, 1991/92 chairman, responded for this committee.

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The scholarships are awarded at several professional levels. The first is to a library school student who has expressed interest in the field of medical librarianship; the second is to a minority library school student who has decided on a career in medical librarianship; and the third is for a doctoral candidate who has the desire to pursue the highest degree in health sciences librarianship.

The Cunningham Memorial Fellowship is for the benefit of a medical librarian from another country who will benefit from traveling in the United States and visiting a variety of libraries. This year's award winner is from Beijing, China.

The professional development of the librarian is addressed by two grants. The continuing education grant is awarded twice a year to deserving candidates who demonstrate a need for further development. This is directly linked to the educational opportunities stated in Goal II. One of this year's awards went to a librarian who wanted to enroll in his city's leadership program. The experience gained from this intensive development course should provide the Medical Library Association with another leader. The research grant is made to a librarian, or more than one librarian, who presents a research proposal that will contribute to the education of the grantee as well as make an impact on medical librarianship. This year's research proposal concerns a serials proposal that should be applicable in all sizes of libraries.

The Grants and Scholarship Committee raises funds for awarding these grants and scholarships. Fund-raising items are selected for the annual meeting, where a booth is set up near the registration desk. Volunteers at the booth have the opportunity of working with MLA leaders, past and present.

Members of the committee mount a display at the annual meeting of the past scholarship and grant winners. Recognition is given at the annual meeting to the recipients of the grants and scholarships.

The committee and jury members learn a great deal from their year(s) of service. The research jury, for example, has to apply a rigorous test to each ap-

plication before accepting it for approval. The submission of the request is also a learning experience for the requester. Some proposals are not accepted the first time they are submitted, but can be resubmitted if the suggestions by jury members are adopted and refined.

MLA members will be pleased with the new emphasis on the role of the librarian. The majority of members are serving in the trenches and will appreciate a focus on their educational needs and the services they provide to the users of health information [3].

Continuing education (CE) has for many years been the strongest and most sought after program MLA offers. From the library school, medical librarianship gets its raw material. It is the work of the librarian teachers, both in our libraries and in our MLA CE courses, that has been the strongest and most consistent force for promoting and improving the role of the librarian. Whatever new skills have been required over the years, they can be learned through MLA CE courses: planning, management, personnel, automation, services, specific skills—all are available through MLA CE courses. And they are available at local as well as national meetings. The 1991/92 chairman of the Continuing Education Committee, Gale Dutcher, sees the strong role of the program for strengthening the role of the librarian in these changing times.

The CE Committee members have pursued a two-pronged goal of bringing courses in current or hot topics to the membership without losing sight of the need to provide access to courses in traditional, basic, or core areas. Thus we have had new perspectives courses in areas of new technology (local area networks, for example) and management techniques (total quality management, for example). We are also developing courses in the environment of health care and online searching, to match the requirements of the academy. In addition, the committee is continuously exploring alternative delivery methods such as computer-based

training, to make continuing education more accessible to the membership.

By the provision of educational opportunities, the CE Committee supports the needs of the membership to stay abreast of new information, to hone their skills, and to expand their knowledge in areas relevant to providing information services and educational programs for health information users. The CE Committee believes that it is essential for health information professionals to have access to a diverse body of educational opportunities because the role of the information professional is such a diverse one.

The Continuing Education Committee believes that its primary role is to provide the membership of the Medical Library Association with opportunities which allow the development and improvement of their skills and knowledge in all relevant areas. By improving skills, developing new skills, or adding to a knowledge base, MLA members will then have the tools they need to provide the services and programs needed by health information users [4].

One of the association's newer committees, taking over the process in 1987 previously assigned the Certification Committee, the Credentialing Committee represents the association's new direction in this area. Sandra Wood, the committee's chairman, stresses the Credentialing Committee's importance to Goal II.

The Credentialing Committee's charge of reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating MLA's Program of Professional Development and Recognition directly supports all three of MLA's goals to improve "health through professional excellence and leadership" of its members [5]. The committee's charge is specifically relevant to Goal II because the Academy of Health Information Professionals is designed to enhance the professional role of the librarian through the requirements for certification. The multileveled academy encourages MLA members to participate in continuing education activities, thus updating their skills and technical

knowledge. Members at higher levels of the academy must also participate in professional activities.

The Committee is specifically interested in Goal II because certification is intended to increase and update the skills and knowledge of the librarian, resulting in improved information services and educational programs for health information users. The requirements for entry into the academy include both experience and specific areas of competence. However, academy members must extend themselves beyond the confines of their own jobs by participating in continuing education or professional activities. The intent is that certified members will keep abreast of new technologies and ideas and then integrate them into their own daily activities. It is through this transfer process that the goal of providing quality information services and educational programs for health information users is met.

MLA members would realize many gains from accomplishing this goal. Perhaps the most important gain would be increased visibility within one's own institution, and increased professional status on a national level. The process that we are describing is that of the changing role of librarians. It is more than just creating new information services; it is actually educating health information users—teaching them to be aware of the methods of accessing information and also of the librarian's role in the information transfer process—resulting in an enhanced image or role.

The Credentialing Committee is acutely aware of its vital role in encouraging professional excellence and enhancing the visibility and role of the librarian. Membership in the academy requires that MLA members be exposed to outside influences through continuing education and professional accomplishments. The academy encourages professional development along a career path. By supporting and encouraging activities such as grants (newly approved) and publication, the program facilitates the development and dissemination of new programs and services.

To accomplish Goal II, certification and membership in the Academy of Health Information Professionals must be viewed as a worthwhile credential.

It is the committee's intent and challenge to market the Academy of Health Information Professionals to the MLA membership and to health care administrators. Overall evaluation and review of the program is essential to the concept of certification and to the quality of the program. The committee has already responded to input from the membership by making changes in the point structure of the program. Adaptability and program revision in response to the changing environment are essential to the success of the program; ongoing evaluation of the credentialing program is another way that the committee is responding to Goal II.

Membership in the Academy of Health Information Professionals should be viewed as an indication of professional excellence and leadership. Participating in continuing education activities and professional development are viewed by the com-

mittee as ways to foster new information services and educational programs for health information users [6].

In my final President's Page, I will cover committee activities related to MLA's services, governance, and publications and the way they are directed to enhancing the professional role of the librarian vis-à-vis Goal II of MLA's strategic plan.

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