HIGHLIGHTING LIBRARY OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Introduction

A traditional part of medical library programs has been to provide services that meet the information needs of the community. In the 1960s, the National Library of Medicine’s (NLM) Regional Medical Library Program formed a paper-based network to address these needs. During the past three decades, the expansion of electronic services and self-service searching has made it necessary for medical libraries to extend their community activities to include computer and bibliographic search training. Development of GRATEFUL MED® and the need to train health care providers to conduct their own searches has accelerated this activity.

In recent years, NLM has funded several projects to assess information needs and provide GRATEFUL MED training. Two papers in this section on library outreach programs provide evidence of this growing activity. In addition, a paper supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration substantiates similar training and information needs of health care practitioners in rural areas.

Outreach programs are becoming an important medical library service that meets a growing need. Although many libraries are engaged in this activity, these three papers are grouped together in this issue to illustrate the involvement of medical libraries in what has become an emerging trend of this electronic age—to reach beyond the walls of the library.

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