SYMPOSIUM

Applying knowledge and skills: new directions
Edited by Carolyn E. Lipscomb

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INTRODUCTION*

Health sciences librarianship is multifaceted, combining an ability to use the knowledge bases of the health sciences and the technical expertise of librarianship with analytical, interpersonal, and organizational skills. The rapid changes in the health sciences and information environments create an atmosphere that requires examination of both traditional and new roles for information professionals and their services. Health sciences librarians are in a pivotal position to manage biomedical information in ways that extend traditional functions of the library, even transcending the library itself. In assuming new responsibilities, librarians must forge alliances within institutions and collaborate with fellow professionals. The diversity of the knowledge bases that health sciences librarians draw upon enables them to move in new directions and to apply their skills in nontraditional areas [1].

The papers in this symposium are based in part on presentations sponsored by the Medical Library Association's Medical Library Education Section and the Platform for Change Implementation Task Force. They highlight innovative roles for health sciences libraries and librarians and examine the implications for the knowledge and skills needed to carry them out.

Ash studies an organization that has comprehensively integrated information functions and analyzes how the Integrated Advanced Information Management Systems program has affected the work of the professionals involved. She also pays particular attention to the knowledge and skills that the librarians perceive they need to operate in this environment. Mead and Richards report on providing information support as a member of meta-analysis research teams, bringing the specialization of librarians to research projects and enhancing library functions. Satterthwaite et al. describe the participation of librarians along with other faculty as facilitators in medical school courses and how this new role draws on traditional librarian skills. The Schatz and Whitehead paper recounts the integration of information support from the library with the medical school’s curriculum development department; this arrangement has strengthened partnerships with the school and demonstrated the expertise of librarians. Snape discusses the knowledge and skills most consequential to health sciences librarians who now work in nontraditional settings or in other types of libraries and reports the value of interpersonal skills in making a transition. In providing education and other assistance for scientific writing and editing, Stephens and Campbell recognize the importance of combining the abilities of other professionals with those of librarians. In the final paper, Schwartz describes the expanded role of a health sciences librarian in faculty development and medical education.

There are at least two common threads in these papers. One is the importance of knowing the environment, enabling the librarian to identify and stake out new roles and alliances that both are valuable to the institution and take advantage of the strengths of libraries and librarians. The other is the significance of the personal skills underlying the technical knowledge of the profession: the competence to communicate effectively, to solve problems, and to advocate support for the mission and outreach role of the library. Anderson's description of the attributes of the health sciences librarian confirms the knowledge and skills implied in these papers: proficiencies in interpersonal relations and communication, leadership qualities within the overall institutional context, and organizational knowledge of the functional role of information within the environment [2].

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REFERENCES