Health information for the global village
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INTRODUCTION

It was indeed a special occasion to have 696 health sciences librarians from eighty countries participate in the 7th International Congress on Medical Librarianship (7ICML), May 10-12, 1995, in Washington, D.C., following the Ninety-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association. Attendees represented librarians, information specialists, documentalists, health informaticians, and others who work on every continent to ensure that information is collected, organized, preserved, and disseminated to prevent disease and to preserve and improve the health of the world’s people. The theme for both meetings was “Health Information for the Global Village,” a concept made possible by advances in communication, computing, and other technologies. Attendees had the opportunity to learn about advances in health sciences librarianship in the United States during the MLA meeting. Anticipating that most librarians would attend MLA ’95, the 7ICML International Organizing Committee planned keynote addresses, plenary sessions, contributed paper and poster sessions, continuing education opportunities, library tours, breakfast- and lunch-time seminars, time for informal discussions, and social events to emphasize the global aspects of the profession.

The following papers represent some of the ideas presented during 7ICML, beginning with the welcome given by President Clinton, who emphasized the significance of health sciences librarians’ task of disseminating “the important information that guides health care providers and helps to save people’s lives.”

Following greetings from representatives of several organizations, George A. O. Alleyne, M.D., and Donald A. B. Lindberg, M.D., presented keynote addresses. Dr. Alleyne emphasized the relationship between health and human development, pointing out new roles that health sciences librarians might consider in order to ensure health in the communities in which they serve. Dr. Lindberg recalled the term modern library and stressed that the skills possessed by the modern librarian, the librarians in the audience and the profession, are those needed for the developing electronic networks. However, he noted that in order to stay modern, librarians must undertake concerted self-improvement programs to hone their skills and acquire new ones.

The four 7ICML plenary sessions were designed to explore the technologies that enable the concept of the global village, describe examples of information resources available through the Internet, examine how the networked library changes librarians’ roles, and discuss aspects of a common vision of the future of this international profession. The presentations during the first plenary session were primarily audiovisual presentations; thus, none are represented here. Examples of information resources in the second plenary session were illustrated by two topics, women’s health and HIV/AIDS. Each was introduced by a speaker who described the important concerns in the area. Astrid Heiberg, M.D.’s overview of the issues in women’s health is presented here. Two papers from the third plenary session are included: Derek Law’s provocative “The Networked Environment and the Challenge of Change” and Daniel B. Addo’s “So Far and Yet So Near,” which provides a current look at information access in an African setting. The last paper, “Unity in Diversity: Toward a Common Professional Vision of Health Sciences Librarianship,” by Merlita M. Opena, views the future needs of the profession from a management point of view.

The papers presented here are only a small part of the formal presentations or the total experience of 7ICML. The International Organizing Committee hopes that these papers will both stimulate health sciences librarians to consider the differing international views of their profession, especially as their interaction through the electronic networks increases, and encourage attendance at the next ICML in London as the next century begins.

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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings to everyone gathered in our nation’s capital for the [7th] International Congress on Medical Librarianship.

Between the development of a cure and its implementation, the task falls on the world’s medical librarians to disseminate the important information that guides health care providers and helps to save people’s lives. As part of a vast network of care that reaches communities in every corner of the globe, we owe medical librarians a debt of gratitude for their expertise, their commitment to scientific investigation, and their devotion to helping others.

I am pleased that you have chosen “Health Information for the Global Village” as your conference theme. As information technology rapidly shrinks our world, we are presented with new opportunities for communicating vital medical knowledge and the latest techniques with greater speed and detail than ever before. With your continued commitment to this vision, you are helping to make a safer, healthier society for all of us.

Best wishes for a most successful conference.

Bill Clinton, Washington, D.C., April 17, 1995