



Consider Health Sciences Librarianship



Stacy Brody, Sara Hoover, and Brian McDonald
Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library, The George Washington University

Abstract

2020 saw a dramatic rise in interest in publications associated with the health sciences, medical research, and consumer health information. With this growth came an increased awareness of the roles of information professionals. Health sciences librarians support medical professionals in providing care, researchers in advancing knowledge, faculty and students in furthering their education, and consumers in meeting their personal information needs.

This poster aims to provide the insider perspective on the skills needed to succeed as a health sciences librarian - and they might not be what you expect! The authors also describe the unique benefits and opportunities of health sciences librarianship, from the hospital librarian to the community outreach librarian to the academic reference and instruction librarian.

The poster concludes with next steps to explore the profession and to refine the skills needed to succeed as a health sciences librarian.

Methods

- We consulted the literature on new and emerging roles for health sciences librarians and reflected on our personal professional experiences.
- We also emailed friends and colleagues to inquire about their experiences as health sciences librarians:
 - What do you love about medical librarianship?
 - What unique opportunities do you find in health sciences librarianship?
 - What skills do you think are important for health sciences librarianship?
 - What skills did you not expect to use as a medical librarian but have become invaluable?
 - What do you think people would find most surprising about being a medical librarian?

Types of Health Sciences Librarianship

- Hospital Librarian
- Consumer Health / Outreach Librarian
- Public Health Librarian
- Academic Sciences Librarian
- Government Health Sciences Librarian
- Corporate Librarian (i.e. Pharmaceutical)
- Clinical Practice Manager
- Data Services/Systems Librarian
- Others!!!!



I Love Medical Librarianship Because...

- "All of the work I do has an impact on future and current healthcare workers, patients, and loved ones." (Community Health & Engineering Librarian)
- "It's gratifying to know that you are helping medical professionals drive forward essential biomedical research and have a positive effect on healthcare outcomes." (Health Sciences Librarian)
- "I love being in a 'customer service' role and enjoy connecting patrons with the resources or answers they're looking for." (Medical Librarian, Hospital)
- "I feel like I am supporting efforts to address the pandemic's repercussions." (Engagement Specialist)
- "The resources I provide or train people in how to use help nurses improve the healing process for patients, help medical students become better at clinical care, and help physicians and other clinicians deepen their understanding of the latest advances in medical care." (Resources & Acquisitions Librarian)



Unique Opportunities

- Work with information resources beyond traditional books and journals, from computational tools to datasets to bedside clinical resources and other emerging technologies³
- Continuous learning and professional development, including specializations
- "Health sciences librarianship is broad. Depending on the work you do, you can support the information needs of health sciences students, clinicians, researchers, hospital administrators, patients, their loved ones, and beyond." (Community Health & Engineering Librarian)
- "I have the opportunity to learn about health information technology (HIT), something that affects all of us who access our electronic health records. HIT involves many disciplines that I never thought I'd be interested in, like artificial intelligence and semantic technology." (Engagement Specialist)
- "better advocate for myself medically and also gain a better understanding of my health and that of my family." (Medical Librarian, Hospital)

Roles & Responsibilities

- Support translation of biomedical research to practice
- Support evidence-based medical practice³
- Find - or make findable - resources for your health sciences and biomedical community
- Provide instruction or training - one-on-one or in classes - to students, researchers, and clinicians on information resources

"A big part of my current position involves literature searches. It's amazing to see the sheer amount of information that's being produced every day, and sifting through it to find the best answers for my patrons' questions can be quite a challenge. And a lot of times, you have to help the patron define the question in the first place, from vague to more specific, in order to find the best resources to help them. Some days it really feels like **detective** work, which is kind of cool." (Health Sciences Librarian)



Hospital Librarians

- Answer clinical questions and directly support clinical care
- Facilitate urgent interlibrary loan requests for articles to ensure physicians and surgeons have the evidence they need
- Conduct searches
- Learn from patrons, searches, and continuing education - there is always something new in medicine!
- Go on rounds to promote evidence-based medicine
- Support patient education initiatives

Skills Needed

Interpersonal Skills

- Collaboration
- Customer service mindset
- Communication skills, diplomacy in working with different user groups
- Understanding institutional structures/politics

"It's important to tailor your instructional approach to the specific user's abilities. One day you may work with a younger medical resident who is very familiar with navigating through a database interface and computer technology, and the next day you may work with a provider who struggles with email attachments and wishes you could just fax them something." (Resources & Acquisitions Librarian)

"I worked many years at a Whole Foods Market and they drilled the importance of great customer service into me, and I feel like that has followed me in my professional career. I feel it is so important to ensure your patrons feel understood, respected, valued, and deserving of your time and expertise so that they will continue to utilize the library, potentially collaborate, and spread the word!" (Medical Librarian, Hospital)

Academic Health Sciences

- Support research on diverse topics
- Educate students, researchers, and faculty on the scholarly communications cycle³
- Provide assistance in managing, sharing, reusing, and archiving research data
- Support public access to federally-funded scientific research results
- Aid in measuring the impact of scholarly works²
- Maintain an institutional repository to showcase the works of faculty and students
- Provide information literacy instruction - either embedded, one-shot, or a full course! - to students and clinicians

"The health sciences are data driven to a large degree, so librarians get opportunities to help not just with identifying "good" data, but improving the process in which that data gets applied." (Resources & Acquisitions Librarian)

Consumer Health & Outreach

- Support outreach efforts, collection development, and health promotion programming at public libraries
- Support patient education programs, services, and collections at hospitals
- Support outreach to clinical and academic communities at your institution
- Attend health fairs and other community events

"I took a "Materials for Children" course as a MLIS student. Years later, I utilized from my skills from this course to create book lists for K-12 students interested in STEM in collaboration with health sciences students and colleagues who work in public/school libraries and healthcare centers." (Community Health & Engineering Librarian)

Technical Skills

- Health information literacy
- Knowledge of scientific communication and the research cycle
- Data science skills
- Information retrieval skills
- Optional:** degree in a science field¹

"Being able to decipher bibliographic records and understand the importance of good metadata is incredibly important. My current position is in public services... I take a metadata-driven approach to my job, categorizing the reference inquiries and literature search requests that come in and tagging them with search terms for easier retrieval." (Health Sciences Librarian)

Personal Skills

- Curiosity, growth mindset for career-long learning
- Ability to multitask and prioritize projects
- Adaptability

"You also have to be willing to step outside your comfort zone; in one of my previous positions, I was asked to step into a teaching role, which was a departure from my usual duties of cataloging and digital archiving. I thought I'd be terrible at it! It was tough at first, but I got better, and more comfortable explaining things in front of a group." (Health Sciences Librarian)

Next Steps & Resources

- Join a professional organization and/or local chapters; student memberships are affordable and with so many conferences virtual this year, you should be able to score conference discounts and save on travel costs
- Take a course with the Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM)
- When possible, focus a course assignment on a health information resource
- Keep up with the latest on listservs, hashtags (#medlibs), and journals
- Reach out to a medical librarian for an informational interview
- Find more resources on our Consider Health Sciences Librarianship LibGuide <https://go.gwu.edu/bridgingmedlibs>
- Interested in learning more about the roles & opportunities highlighted on this poster? Reach out to Stacy Brody, sbrody98@gwu.edu! She is happy to put you in touch with the librarians interviewed in creating this presentation.

References

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Velda Jones for her assistance with poster layout and design.

Librarian Contributors

- Sarah C. Clarke, MSLS, AHIP
Medical Librarian, Darnall Medical Library
Walter Reed National Military Medical Center
- Scott Denlinger, MS
Resources & Acquisitions Librarian
Penn Medicine LG Health Library &
PA College Seraph Foundation Learning Commons
Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences
- Meaghan Heselden, MLIS
Health Sciences Librarian
- Amanpreet "Aman" Kaur, CFCS, MLIS
(Pronouns: She/Her/Hers)
Community Health & Engineering Librarian
Penn Libraries
- Louise To
Engagement Specialist, OET
Network of the National Library of Medicine