

ENNIS, Lisa A. and MITCHELL, Nicole. *The Accidental Health Sciences Librarian*. Medford, New Jersey: Information Today Inc. 2010. 213 pages, paperback. ISBN 9 781573 87 3956. Price \$29.99

Like many information professionals, although I loved books and libraries from an early age, I always associated librarians with public or school libraries. My first inkling that a “hospital library” meant more than tea, cookies and Mills & Boon/Harlequins came as part of a hospital temping assignment. All contributors to this book have had similar experiences, discovering medical libraries, in general, by serendipity.

The first chapter, Health Sciences Librarianship, attempts to dispel two common misconceptions. Firstly, a background in science is not essential, and secondly, healthcare librarians work in many locations other than medical schools or hospitals. Chapter 2 looks at putting the medical into health sciences librarianship. After a brief history of the National Library of Medicine, the Regional medical Library Program and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, this chapter outlines MeSH headings (medical subject headings). There is a particularly useful general outline of MeSH on p.36 and a slightly more detailed explanation of the fact that what a layperson would term Cancer, MeSH would index under neoplasm, and nosebleed, for instance, would map to epistaxis. Chapter 3, it’s all about the People, outlines the sheer variety of patrons the average health library can expect, from students to occasional patients.

Chapter 4 concentrates on technology, and many comments will strike a chord with librarians in more than just health sciences. One of the main difficulties cited is the sheer rate of change of technology, not to mention communicating with IT departments, and above all, managing expectations and attitude. This chapter alone would merit a separate publication.

Chapter 5 concentrates on databases and resources: possibly one of the steepest learning curves for new health sciences librarians. Resources include Pubmed and MEDLINE; CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature); MD Consult; UpToDate; PDA Resources; NLM Mobile; Epcrates Rx; Diagnosaurus; Essential Evidence Plus; Skyscape; Cochrane Library; National Guideline Clearinghouse, and, in a rare nod to a non-American resource, the TRIP Database.

The final chapter, Resources and Networking, suggests some very starting points, including associations, and how to get involved, the main one being the MLA. The content is largely shaped by the results of the Accidental Health Sciences Librarian Survey, included as an appendix. Other appendices include a list of selected North American health sciences library associations and selected health sciences organizations. Recommended reading and the separate section on websites are given by chapter, making it easy to find areas of interest.

This book's many strengths include the high number of case studies, with practical examples of how individuals have ended up working in health sciences environments. Case studies range from Community Services Librarians to Outreach Education Co-ordinators, and universities to commercial companies. There is also an accompanying website, at ahslbook.wordpress.com.

The book has a very easy to read style, with a good mix of general background hints and tips and further advice and information. The very short glossary covers a small number of the technical and specialised terms and abbreviations used. The index is easy to use and the book includes many nuggets of vital advice for anyone in a specialised library role, but especially in health: "don't assume that a widget to you is a widget to a doctor or nurse – they might call it a whatzit", and "don't even try to keep up with the technology – unless technology is your 'thing' of course. It also emphasises that health sciences librarians exist to dispense information – not medical advice.

As the title indicates, this book is very focused on the United States. "Health sciences librarian" is a job title more commonly used in America than in the UK or the Commonwealth, for example. It could have been strengthened by some acknowledgement of and input from the world outside North America. There is no reference to the BNI [British Nursing Index database], for instance, or to EAHIL, CILIP, or to Australian or New Zealand or South African organisations. Many themes, however, will resonate internationally: the demographics; the difficulty of gaining recognition for the profession; diminishing budgets; the rising costs of materials and resources and more.

This is, overall, an excellent introduction to health sciences librarianship, whether you want introductory books to read, insights into the technical resources used regularly, case studies, or nuggets of advice on a range of topics. It would be a good choice for those not sure if health library work is for them – or to remind those of us who are "accidental health sciences librarians" how we ended up here in the first place.

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