

International Perspectives and Initiatives

Abstract

This is the 10th in a series of articles exploring international trends in health science librarianship. This issue describes developments in health science librarianship in the first decade of the 21st century in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The next issue will report on Japan and South Korea.

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International trends in health science librarianship Part 10: The Greater China area

This article reviews the development of health science librarianship in the first decade of the 21st century in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Along with socio-economic development and new technological applications, health science librarianship in the Greater China Area has developed rapidly, achieving tremendous progress during the past decade. Health libraries have undergone huge changes in terms of size, scale, resources, services and interlibrary cooperation. However, there are still some challenges to be overcome, some of which are similar to those faced by libraries in other countries. These include a tension between a demand for more electronic resources and limited library budgets; the need to adapt physical spaces; and helping librarians to transform their roles.

Health science librarianship in China

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Overview of Chinese health sciences libraries

Health sciences libraries in China are categorised into three groups: health sciences libraries in health sciences research institutions (around 20 libraries); health sciences libraries in health sciences universities and colleges (around 140 libraries); and hospital libraries (around 1110 libraries). These groups include traditional Chinese medical libraries and army health sciences libraries, but do not include small-scale medical libraries with limited resources. During the past decade, many libraries have constructed new buildings with more space and multiple functions. An increasing number of library areas have been transformed into information commons (ICs), learning commons (LCs), learning centres or group study areas in response to the development of electronic collections and online services.

There are many health sciences library associations and consortia in China, the most important and influential being the Chinese Society of Medical Informatics, the Hospital Library Committee of the Chinese Library Society and the China Academic Library & Information System (CALIS) Health Science Library Consortium. Established by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1998, CALIS^{1,2} is now the largest university library consortium in China, with 1600 member libraries. CALIS's mission is to foster the sharing of resources and establish extensive cooperation among its members with respect to online cooperative cataloguing, collaborative purchasing, interlibrary loans and document delivery, digital library projects, as well as continuing education and training programmes for librarians. CALIS aims to continually improve user satisfaction with the document retrieval service provided to the higher education system. The goal of the CALIS Health Science Library Consortium, founded by the CALIS National Information Center in Medicine (CALIS NICM)³

in Peking University Health Science Library, is to organise and coordinate the implementation of the activities outlined above.

Cooperation and resource sharing between health sciences libraries

Under the leadership of the CALIS NICM, over the past decade, the CALIS Health Science Library Consortium has launched comprehensive and multi-level cooperative activities, the most notable being:

- Setting up 75 collaborative purchasing initiatives (including database renewals) with 65 libraries participating. To date, there have been 1649 purchases leading to a substantial financial savings for all participating libraries⁴.
- The implementation of a large-scale interlibrary loan and document delivery service across the country to guarantee all patrons in China's higher education system can get access to the documents they need.

In addition, CALIS's monthly continuing education programme (called the CALIS Online Class) provides lectures in health science librarianship for all on-the-job health sciences librarians in China. CALIS's annual academic conference provides a forum for discussing hot topics, trends and opportunities, as well as challenges facing Chinese health sciences librarians. All health sciences libraries have cooperated to develop digital library projects and build special databases which are freely available. These databases include the *China Theses & Dissertations Database*, the *Biomedical OA Resources Database*, the *Teaching Reference Books Database* and the *Union Catalogue Database*.

Role transformation and extension of health sciences Librarians

There is universal agreement that libraries are greatly influenced by the Internet which presents enormous challenges in the 21st century. Consequently, health sciences librarians have to rethink their mission and extend their roles. In the last decade, as well as providing traditional literature services and reference services, China's health sciences librarians have sought to provide a more diverse range of services. These include: formal teaching courses such as 'medical information

retrieval and utilisation', 'information literacy', 'medical information analysis', for all levels of students; a variety of lectures for teachers and students; customised, individual counselling services for information retrieval; as well as recommendations regarding bibliographic management software and instructions on the use of bibliographic management software.

Most Chinese health sciences librarians major in medicine-related disciplines in their studies, which provides them with a solid foundation enabling them to offer in-depth professional information services. Participation by health librarians in faculty research programmes makes it possible to offer more specialist subject services. Librarians track the progress of these research programmes and provide decision support for them. Finally, some health sciences libraries provide high-level knowledge services, including research programme feasibility assessment through literature retrieval and analysis (to provide an objective assessment report about whether and how a research programme has been carried out internationally or domestically; academic assessment; evaluation of core journals; research output evaluation; and reviews of foreign teaching materials.

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Health science librarianship in Hong Kong

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Hong Kong is a global metropolis located at the crossroads where East meets West with a unique blend of eastern and western influences. There are two internationally accredited health science libraries serving the medical schools at their respective university and over twenty hospital libraries. As there is no national health library or health library association in Hong Kong, librarians have had to build their own networks through local and global collaborations and by participating in international conferences. With highly sophisticated and fast communication networks, the world has become increasingly more connected. Trends in health science librarianship in Hong Kong often reflect global trends.

Evidence-based practice

Great efforts have been made to support evidence-based practice (EBP). Medical literature searching has been made a mandatory module in the Faculty's EBP curriculum for medical students.¹ EBP instruction is also provided to students studying nursing, Chinese medicine and other disciplines. Besides face-to-face instruction, successful attempts were made to create web-based interactive tutorials on EBP within WebCT for e-learning² as well as other e-learning platforms such as Moodle. M-learning using mobile devices has also been introduced for students and health professionals. Library instruction on search skills has thus progressed from face-to-face sessions to online interactive learning and M-learning. For public hospitals, in 2000, the Hong Kong Hospital Authority Knowledge Management Unit created an e-Knowledge Gateway to support EBP and knowledge sharing among healthcare professionals.

Digital content and library consortia

Significant progress in expanding access to digital resources has been made during the past decade. Rigorous efforts were made to rationalise the serials collections and streamline expenditure. The

deduplication exercise has resulted in substantial reduction in print duplicates and the need to reduce space costs further expedited the move to e-only access.

The global recession and consequent reduction in library funding have been the driving force behind the development of library consortia. Hong Kong's Medical Consortium, initiated in 2003, provides access to key medical databases and e-books at reduced price. Starting in 2009, cross-border cooperation between health science libraries in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Greater China has resulted in tremendous cost savings in the purchase of e-book collections. Locally, health science libraries, as members of the Consortiall³ [a sub-committee of JULAC (Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee)], participate in resource sharing and collaborative collection development activities coordinated by academic libraries. Major projects include the Electronic Resources Academic Library Link (ERALL)⁴ and the Cicada-Super eBook Consortium,⁵ another joint venture between academic libraries in Hong Kong and Taiwan to develop the Super eBook Collection.

Regional and international partnerships

Health science librarians have long recognised the link between partnership and progress. Closer cooperation between librarians across the borders of Hong Kong and China was stimulated by a seminar on Library and Information Services in Health Science Libraries held in Hong Kong in 2004. Regular meetings have been held in the ensuing years at the annual CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System) Medical Librarians' Forum and the Taiwan Medical Library Committee Meeting, where librarians meet to discuss issues of common interests. Health science librarians in Hong Kong are alerted to global trends and scholarly communications through participation in the Medical Library Association (USA) and other international conferences.

Open access

To support the open-access movement and free flow of information, university libraries in Hong

Kong are following the global trend to develop sustainable institutional repositories and open archives. Health science librarians are responsible for obtaining medical faculty publications which provides ready access to a wealth of health-related data and information. One example is the HKU Scholars Hub,⁶ a knowledge exchange initiative to support the open-access movement, thereby encouraging collaborative research as well as local and international exchanges.

Library space: learning commons

'Learning commons' (a term used to describe friendly, user-centred environments for staff and students) have been well received. Great effort has been made to acquire new space and reconfigure existing facilities. A range of new services have been set up to support learning, writing, research and access to technology. Comfortable open areas are also available for interaction and collaborative learning.

Conclusion

Health science librarians in Hong Kong encounter similar challenges as their international colleagues. The challenges are to provide high-quality professional development to improve staff skills and knowledge, to enhance library services with innovative approaches and managing to 'do more with less'.

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Health science librarianship in Taiwan

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Roles of the Medical Library Committee

In Taiwan, there are around 400 health science libraries, which can be categorised as medical centre, regional hospital, district hospital, medical school and research institution libraries. (<http://www.lac.org.tw/committee/med/members.htm>). With

Table 1 Popular topics – CE courses in the MLC (Taiwan) annual meetings, 2000–2010

| Topic | Years | Frequency |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Evidence-based medicine | 2003–2010 | 8 |
| e-journals | 2000–2004; 2007, 2010 | 7 |
| Library management | 2007–2010 | 4 |
| e-resources | 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010 | 4 |
| Introduction to database and IR | 2006, 2007, 2010 | 3 |
| Public relation and marketing | 2001, 2006, 2009 | 3 |
| Evaluation and assessment | 2004, 2005, 2007 | 3 |
| Collection development policy | 2001, 2003, 2004 | 3 |
| Copyright and intellectual property | 2002, 2004, 2006 | 3 |
| Architecture and space planning | 2004, 2009, 2010 | 3 |
| Internet resources | 2000, 2005, 2007 | 3 |

Source: <http://www.lac.org.tw/committee/med/seminar.htm>

Table 2 International exchange activities, 2000–2010

| | |
|------------|--|
| Feb 2006 | Invited a delegation of library directors from China CALIS medical centre to attend MLC annual meeting |
| May 2008 | Participated in MLA annual meeting in Chicago, United States; presenting a poster 'The development of medical library consortia in Taiwan' |
| Oct 2008 | Participated in the medical library management forum for China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in Singapore |
| April 2009 | Attended the 3rd CALIS working conference for university medical libraries in Dalian, China; presenting a speech 'The development of medical librarianship in Taiwan: celebrating the 30th anniversary of MLC' |
| Sept 2009 | Participated in the 10th International Congress on Medical Librarianship (ICML) in Brisbane, Australia; presenting a poster 'The development and future of the medical librarianship in Taiwan' |

different objectives and resources from their parent institutions, these libraries differ in terms of space, collections, budgets, services and staff size.

The Medical Library Committee (MLC), Library Association of ROC (Taiwan), was established in 1978 and began to hold a 2-day annual meeting in 1979, inviting scholars and experts to give speeches on the year's hot topics. Since then, the MLC annual meeting has been the most important continuing education event for medical librarians in Taiwan. Table 1 shows the popular topics for continuing education (CE) courses in the MLA annual meeting in the period 2000–2010.

International exchanges

Since 2006, the medical library community of Taiwan has engaged in intensive exchange activities with medical library colleagues in the Greater China Area. In that year, the MLC invited a delegation of library professionals from the Medical Center of the China Academic Library and Information System (CALIS) to attend its annual meeting. In return, MLC members were invited to participate in CALIS's annual working conference. This reciprocal arrangement fosters ongoing exchanges. MLC also arranges for a Taiwan delegation of medical librarians to attend international conferences, for instance, the annual meeting of the Medical Library Association (MLA) and International Congress on Medical Librarianship (ICML) in order to present information on the development and performance of Taiwan's medical librarians to the world (Table 2).¹

Medical library consortia

Since the late 1990s, e-resources have become the primary collections for medical libraries in Taiwan. However, the annual library budget can hardly

meet the price increases for e-resources, resulting in operational difficulties. From 2000, many medical library consortia were formed in Taiwan (see Table 3), resulting in a better discount rate being secured. We learned that if all medical libraries team up, negotiation of a reasonable price will be easier. In 2010, the MLC decided to survey all medical libraries. The aim of the survey was to determine the willingness of members to participate in the MLC consortium and identify core medical e-resources for negotiation. As a result, 66.68% of the participants agreed to support the MLC consortium. The MLC then negotiated with e-resource vendors. Vendors of Cochrane Library, MicroMedex, CINAHL and EndNote agreed to a special price offer to the small- and medium-sized libraries. In subsequent years, the MLC has continued to bargain on the price of e-resources.^{2–4}

Table 3 Seven main medical library consortia in Taiwan, 2000–2010

| Name of the consortium | Year established |
|---|------------------|
| Consortium for Medical Electronic Resources in Taiwan (MERIT) | 2000 |
| Electronic Library of the Department of Health, Executive Yuan* | 2003 |
| Taipei Medical University Digital Library Consortium (TMU DiLib)* | 2003 |
| Digital Medical Resource Cooperative Network of Veterans Hospitals* | 2003 |
| Project of united purchasing of core biomedical science journals and databases | 2004 |
| Armed Forces Hospital Digital Library Consortium* | 2005 |
| United purchasing consortium of electronic resources in central and southern Taiwan | 2005 |

Consortia still in operate.

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