

# Leisure reading collections in academic health sciences and science libraries: results of visits to seven libraries

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## Abstract

*Objective:* To visit leisure reading collections in academic science and health sciences libraries to determine how they function and what role they play in their libraries.

*Methods:* The author visited seven libraries with leisure reading collections and carried out a semistructured interview with those responsible either for selection of materials or for the establishment of the collection.

*Results:* These collections contained a variety of materials, with some libraries focusing on health-science-related materials and others on providing recreational reading. The size of the collections also varied, from 186 to 9700 books, with corresponding differences in budget size. All collections were housed apart, with the same loan period as the regular collection. No collections contained electronic materials. Although there was little comparable statistical data on usage, at the six libraries at which active selection was occurring, librarians and library staff felt that the collection was well used and felt that it provided library users with benefits such as stress relief and relaxation and exposure to other perspectives.

*Conclusion:* Librarians and library staff at the libraries that undertook active selection felt that their leisure reading collection was worthwhile. It would be interesting for future work to focus on the user experience of such collections.

*Keywords:* health professionals; libraries, medical; libraries, academic; students; collection development; Europe; interviews; United Kingdom (UK); United States of America (USA)

## Key Messages

- When active selection occurred, librarians and staff felt that their collections offered patrons benefits such as stress relief and relaxation and exposure to other perspectives.
- Print leisure reading materials seem to continue to be of interest to users of academic science and health sciences libraries.
- External funding (through grants or donations) may help academic health sciences librarians to maintain or set up a leisure reading collection at their location.
- An examination of user perceptions of leisure reading collections in academic health sciences or science libraries should be undertaken.

## Background

The role that leisure reading (i.e. extracurricular reading) should play in academic libraries has been

discussed in the literature for more than thirty years.<sup>1–14</sup> Several articles consist of surveys to determine whether academic libraries provide leisure reading collections, while others discuss strategies for promoting, obtaining and choosing materials for them. The surveys showed that a number of (the mainly U.S.) respondents provided leisure reading collections for their patrons.

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Without exception, the articles cited above argue that academic libraries need to provide and promote such collections. Other authors have argued for the inclusion of particular types of materials in academic libraries, such as graphic novels, magazines and ‘chick lit\*’ to serve both scholarly and leisure needs.<sup>15–17</sup> Hsieh found that budget constraints and not seeing provision of leisure reading materials as part of the academic library mandate were the two most common reasons for not providing a leisure reading collection.<sup>18</sup>

Little has been written on the role of academic health sciences libraries in providing leisure reading to their patrons, despite the literature’s acknowledged role in the health humanities. Benefits attributed to including the literature in health practitioner education include increasing empathy; developing cultural competence; and improving the critical thinking, observation and communication skills, of the students.<sup>19–21</sup> Only two articles have been devoted to describing individual leisure reading collections in health sciences libraries.<sup>22,23</sup> The third article, which presents the results of a survey on medical students’ leisure reading, alludes to, but does not describe, the collection set up as a result of the survey.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the fourth article describes ways to provide subject heading access to interfiled fiction in health sciences libraries, but does not describe the collection of any particular library.<sup>25</sup>

On the role of leisure reading in science libraries, the literature is silent.

## Objectives

In this study, the author aimed to visit leisure reading collections in academic science and health sciences libraries to determine how they function and what role they play in their libraries. The intent was to investigate collections that consisted of materials purposefully chosen by librarians (or library staff), rather than donated materials, because the author felt that these selected materials could potentially provide the most reader satisfaction and that their selection was under the greatest control by the libraries in question and thus could be discussed. Also, the focus was on collections in academic libraries destined for use by university students, faculty or staff, rather than patients.

## Methods

The author visited seven leisure reading collections in academic libraries in Europe and the U.S.A. (Table 1): The Aull Collection at New York University in New York, U.S.A.; Dollie’s Corner at Northwestern University in Chicago, U.S.A.; Intermed at Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1 in Lyon, France; Lux Humana at Helsinki University in Helsinki, Finland; The Medicine in Literature Collection at Newcastle University in Newcastle upon Tyne, England; Quartier Libre at Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1 in Lyon, France; and the Scott Memorial Library Leisure Reading Collection at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, U.S.A. All were housed in health sciences libraries except for Quartier Libre, which was housed in a science library. Although the author’s primary interest was health sciences libraries, through her attempts to locate health sciences libraries with leisure reading collections, she also received an invitation to visit a science library.

The author discovered the collections in various ways: three as a result of enquiries posted on electronic mailing lists (MEDINFO and Bibliosanté), two through journal articles,<sup>24,26</sup> one through a personal recommendation by a librarian at one of the previously identified libraries and one through searches of library websites at universities with medical humanities programmes. Although she knew that many leisure reading collections in academic health sciences libraries did not have a link to health humanities programmes, she felt that it would be useful to explore the link between health humanities programmes and leisure reading collections and thus to visit at least one library whose university did offer such a programme.

The author used two other methods to determine the existence of leisure reading collections: Web searches for ‘leisure reading’ and ‘health sciences library’ or ‘medical library’, and e-mail contact with librarians at health sciences libraries. The objectives outlined above meant that the author chose not to visit some of the collections discovered. First, she did not visit collections that were identified as consisting solely of donations or as being ‘book swap’ collections, because her interest

**Table 1** Libraries visited and people interviewed

| Collection name            | Library name, institution                                   | City, country                      | People interviewed   | Library focus   | Aims of collection   |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|-----------------|--|
| Aull Collection            | Ehrman Medical Library, New York University                 | New York, New York, U.S.A.         | Stephen Maher, Collections Librarian   | Health Sciences | Inspire empathy/cultural sensitivity; provide access to extracurricular reading materials  |
| Dollie's Corner            | Galter Health Sciences Library, Northwestern University     | Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.          | James Shedlock, Library Director   | Health Sciences | Give students a break from their studies; inspire empathy/cultural sensitivity; provide access to extracurricular reading materials            |
| Intermed                   | Bibliothèque Rockefeller, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1  | Lyon, France                       | Michaël Moretti, Bibliothécaire, Responsable documentaire  | Health Sciences | Give students a break from their studies; provide access to extracurricular reading materials  |
| Lux Humana                 | Helsinki University Library, Meilahti Campus Library Terkko | Helsinki, Finland                  | Päivi Pekkarinen, Librarian; Lassi Pohjanpää, Library Assistant; Anna-Mari Koivula, Library Communications Officer | Health Sciences | Inspire empathy/cultural sensitivity; provide access to extracurricular reading materials  |
| Medicine in Literature     | Walton Library, Newcastle University                        | Newcastle upon Tyne, England       | Erika Gavillet, Medical Librarian; Richard Thomson, Deputy Director of the Institute of Health and Society         | Health Sciences | Inspire empathy/cultural sensitivity; provide access to extracurricular reading materials  |
| Quartier Libre             | Bibliothèque de la Doua, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1   | Lyon, France                       | Florence Gaume, Bibliothécaire, Responsable des actions culturelles  | Science         | Give students a break from their studies; provide access to extracurricular reading materials; help students to keep abreast of current events |
| Leisure Reading Collection | Scott Memorial Library, Thomas Jefferson University         | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. | Diana Ryan, Director of Collection Management  | Health Sciences | Give students a break from their studies; provide access to extracurricular reading materials  |

was in collections that were purposefully selected for inclusion in the library and were included in the regular library catalogue. Second, she did not visit collections that were intended for use by patients, rather than by student, faculty or staff patrons of the health sciences or medical library, because her interest was in use by the primary patrons of academic libraries. Third, she tried to choose collections that contained a substantial number of items, rather than those that were described as 'small', or were not described at all. Finally, she chose not to visit some libraries because their geographical location made it difficult logistically and/or financially to include them in her library tour itinerary.

The author conducted interviews at the libraries in fall 2010 and spring 2011. Interviews followed a semistructured format (Appendix) and lasted from twenty-two to sixty-six minutes. All interviews were conducted in English except those at the Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, which were conducted in French. In most cases, the author interviewed only the librarian responsible for the leisure reading collection. The Lux Humana interview, however, involved the librarian, library assistant and communications officer with responsibility for the collection. At the University of Newcastle, the author also interviewed one of the authors of the article that led to the Medicine in Literature collection being established.

The author recorded all interviews, transcribed them or had them transcribed, and asked the interviewees to review them and sign a transcript release form. This project was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Ethics Board on 30 September 2010.

After transcription, for each question, the author reviewed all interviewees' responses to identify emergent themes. Quotations included in this article and taken from the French interviews were translated by the author.

## Results

What follows is a brief description of the individual collections, as well as their noteworthy features. Afterwards, characteristics of the leisure reading collections taken as a whole will be discussed.

Aull Collection, Ehrman Medical Library, New York University, New York City, U.S.A

This collection consists of materials selected by Dr. Felice Aull, a faculty member in the School of Medicine, and the founder of the medical humanities online database, *Literature, Arts and Medicine*. The items in it were collected by Dr. Aull while selecting titles for the database; she then donated these materials to the Ehrman Library to make them available to library patrons. Dr. Aull also occasionally asks that the Library buy individual titles for the collection, but the Library undertakes no active selection for the collection. The focus of the collection is on materials designed to inspire empathy or cultural sensitivity; it consists of novels and patient narratives (Table 2). This was the smallest collection visited (186 books; Table 3). As of this writing, the Ehrman Medical Library was closed because of damage inflicted by Superstorm Sandy.

Dollie's Corner, Galter Health Sciences Library, Northwestern University, Chicago, U.S.A

This collection was set up at the request of Dollie Galter, who with her husband funded the 10-million-dollar renovation of Northwestern University's medical library. Mrs. Galter felt that making the literature available in the library would allow medical students to provide more compassionate care to patients and provide the students with an opportunity for stress relief. Therefore, at the time of making the donation for the library renovation, she asked whether the library would set up a leisure reading collection, which the library continues to fund from its regular collection budget.

The collection consists primarily of materials provided by the McNaughton Plan, part of the Brodart library supply company. Under the plan, the library pays an annual subscription fee and in turn is able to rent a certain number of hardcover books per year. If the materials do not circulate, the library is able to return them. The materials are housed in their own dedicated room, 'Dollie's Corner', which has armchairs, stained glass windows and low, browsable shelving.

Although the Northwestern medical programme has a strong medical humanities component, there has been no pressure from the faculty to purchase fiction with a health or medical theme for the

**Table 2** Selection criteria

| Collection name                          | Materials are rented | Medical- or health-themed materials are collected     | Type of materials collected   | Genre fiction is collected                                      |
|--|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Aull Collection                          | No                   | Yes, exclusively                                      | Fiction and patient narratives  | No  |
| Dollie's Corner                          | Yes                  | No  | Fiction, magazines, newspapers, non-fiction   | Yes, mysteries  |
| Intermed                                 | No                   | Yes, some   | Comic books, fiction, magazines, manga, newspapers, non-fiction (science, social science), short stories  | Yes, mysteries, science fiction                                 |
| Lux Humana                               | No                   | Yes, mainly   | Fiction in Finnish, Swedish and English; non-fiction (humanities, social sciences, arts); 1 medical-themed manga  | No  |
| Medicine in Literature                   | No                   | Yes, exclusively                                      | DVD's, fiction (classic and modern), non-fiction  | No  |
| Quartier Libre                           | No                   | No; science library, but focus not on popular science | DVD's, comic books, fiction (French, foreign languages), magazines, manga, newspapers, non-fiction (health, psychology, philosophy, topics in the news) | Yes, horror, mysteries, science fiction, young adult literature |
| Scott Library Leisure Reading Collection | Yes                  | No, except for some non-fiction best-sellers          | Fiction, magazines, newspapers, non-fiction   | Yes, mysteries, romance   |

**Table 3** Acquisitions budget for leisure reading collections visited

| Name  | Annual budget                              | Source of funding  | Size  |
|---|--|--|---|
| Aull Collection                                   | \$0  | Donation of materials by faculty member                                  | 186 books   |
| Dollie's Corner                                   | \$6000 (USD): \$4000 books, \$2000 serials | Library budget   | 800–1000 books; (100–200 donated; about 765 rented) |
| Intermed  | 3000 € not including serials               | Library budget; previously received a grant from a government agency     | 1137 books; 1118 unique titles                      |
| Lux Humana  | 5000 €                                     | 2/5 Library budget; 2/5 Faculty of Medicine; 1/5 local medical societies | 3200 books  |
| Medicine in Literature                            | 500–1000 £                                 | Library budget   | 496 books   |
| Quartier Libre                                    | 14 000 €, not including serials            | Library budget   | 9700 books  |
| Scott Memorial Library Leisure Reading Collection | \$7800 (USD), not including serials        | Library endowment  | 738 books   |

collection. Instead, titles judged to be of general interest are selected from the *New York Times* bestseller list (both fiction and non-fiction).

Quartier Libre (« Free Time »), Bibliothèque de la Doua, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Lyon, France

This collection was the only one housed within a science, rather than a health sciences, library.

Although this collection was first established in the 1960s, the content of the collection was changed in 2009 from popular science, history of science and the literature, to materials of interest to people 18–30 years old, especially those relating to current events and leisure. Materials added included a much-expanded manga collection and a circulating DVD collection. The goals are to promote reading, relaxation and knowledge of current events.

Quartier Libre was the largest collection visited, consisting of approximately 9700 books as well as daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. Novels written in English, German, Italian and Spanish are provided in the original language. Because one focus of this collection is current events (at both the local and world level), the librarian responsible for selection attempts to buy materials relating to events in the news or to cultural events occurring in the community.

This collection was housed in its own room with comfortable furniture. With the renovation of the library, tables were removed from the leisure reading area and armchairs were moved in, in an attempt to make it an area for reading rather than a study space.

Intermed, Bibliothèque Rockefeller, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Lyon, France

This collection was set up to help relieve the stress faced by medical students, whose programme is extremely competitive. The library staff felt that because the students were working long hours at the library, they would not have the opportunity to find reading materials elsewhere, and so it would be important to provide non-curricular material on site.

Books are collected on social sciences, and the sciences, but comics, manga, literary novels, mystery novels and science fiction make up the bulk of the collection.

The budget at the time of the interview was 3000 €. However, part of the funding had come from a programme of the Centre National du Livre (National Book Centre) to support the acquisition of materials from small publishers in francophone countries; in future, this fund would no longer be available to Intermed. Because he knew there would be less money available in future, the librarian responsible for the collection, Michaël Moretti, had chosen to buy paperbacks so that he could add more titles to the collection.

Lux Humana, Meilahti Campus Library Terkko, Helsinki University, Helsinki, Finland

This collection was set up as a result of meetings between faculty in the medical school's Department

of Public Health who had been using the literature in their teaching and interested library staff. All were inspired by collections at the Karolinska Institute (Camera Obscura and Laterna Magica) in Stockholm, Sweden. They formed a working group and, when setting up the collection, asked for suggestions from those working in various areas such as the history of medicine and medical philosophy. The aim of the collection is to improve the communication skills and increase the empathy of medical students.

Novels and non-fiction are purchased in Finnish, Swedish and English. Swedish is the second official language in Finland, so the Swedish-language books are bought to support the Swedish-language programme at the medical school.

The budget allocated for setting up the collection was 12 000 €, spread over the first 2 years. Afterwards, 5000 € per year was allocated for the purchase of new materials, of which 2000 came from the faculty of medicine, 2000 from the library, and 1000 from the medical societies.

Scott Memorial Library Leisure Reading Collection, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, U.S.A

This collection was set up as a result of an endowment from the Towner family who wanted students to have access to leisure reading materials so that they could take a break from their studies. It consists of magazines and books.

As is the case for Dollie's Corner, this collection is also rented through the McNaughton Plan. Fiction titles from the *New York Times* bestseller list make up the bulk of the collection.

The collection is housed in a separate room with large windows on the ground floor of the library.

Medicine in Literature Collection, Walton Library, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, England

This collection was set up because a survey carried out by a medical student of her peers showed that there was demand for the literature collection in the library.<sup>24</sup> Following the survey, meetings of students were held to find out what books they recommended for the collection. Most materials in



the collection have a connection to health or medicine; most are fiction. Because they are much less expensive, most materials are bought in paperback rather than hardcover.

### Collection policies

As mentioned above, the health sciences libraries had various policies on collecting medical- or health-themed materials, with some opting to provide such materials exclusively and others focusing on providing recreational reading materials (Table 2). Many librarians mentioned having difficulty determining what should go into the collection and having to negotiate the line between what they considered good-quality literature/writing and what would be popular with patrons. One interviewee mentioned that while he felt that low-quality literature tended to circulate more than higher-quality materials, he believed it was important to expose patrons to high-quality materials (e.g. winners of literary prizes) by making them available in the collection.

Materials such as 'chick lit', women's magazines, romance and manga were each excluded from at least one collection.

### Selection tools

The librarians and library staff responsible for selecting materials reported using a variety of selection aids. Lists of newly published titles in book trade publications, bestseller lists and book reviews (in newspapers, magazines, book trade publications and medical journals, or on radio or television programmes) were used by several librarians to select materials. Library patrons did not often recommend titles for purchase (although librarians generally bought the materials requested unless cost or lack of availability made this impossible), but other library staff frequently recommended materials for the collection, and two librarians mentioned buying materials that they enjoyed reading themselves, although both were careful to also buy titles outside their own areas of interest.

Medical humanities bibliographies such as *Des livres que j'aimerais que mon médecin lise (Books I would like my Doctor to Read)* by Micheline

Louis-Courvoisier and the *Literature, Arts and Medicine* database were used by two interviewees. Finally, circulation statistics were used by several librarians in deciding whether to buy more titles by a particular author.

### Budget

The acquisitions budget varied greatly among the six collections for which the Library was responsible for active selection, from less than 1000 £ to 14 000 € (Table 3). External funding was an important contributor to these budgets with two collections (Lux Humana and the Scott Memorial Library collection) receiving ongoing external funding, while a third had received a grant in the past (Intermed).

Donations were also a significant source of materials. The Aull Collection consisted entirely of donations, and while none of the librarians at the other locations sought out donations, several mentioned that donations had been made to their leisure reading collections by their users.

Many interviewees spoke of the effect of budget constraints on collection decisions. Two of the interviewees (with the Medicine in Literature and Intermed collections) purchased paperbacks rather than hardcover books because of the lower cost. Two (with Intermed and Lux Humana) also mentioned not purchasing DVD's in part because of their high cost. Also, because of financial crises, both the Medicine in Literature collection and Dollie's Corner had been faced with possible elimination in the previous 2 years. (Indeed, a financial crisis led to the discontinuation of the previous leisure reading collection at the Galter Library (at that time called the Archibald Church Medical Library) in the 1970s.) However, those responsible for both Dollie's Corner and the Medicine in Literature collection had made the decision to continue supporting the collections, albeit at a reduced funding level in the case of the latter. Although health sciences journal and monograph budgets were being reduced at both institutions, the management at both felt that it was important to continue to offer the collection, if possible.

Budget was also an important consideration when it came to selecting materials and the individual titles chosen for purchase (in the case of

Quartier Libre, cost was the first consideration in choosing DVDs). For Lux Humana, cost considerations meant that only about 20% of desired titles could be purchased.

### Housing of the collection

The leisure reading materials in all libraries visited were shelved apart, rather than being interfiled (Table 4). The Lux Humana and Medicine in Literature collections were identified by large banners. The Medicine in Literature collection had previously been shelved with the rest of the collection (because Dewey Classification was used, the literature was shelved together, at the end of the stacks), but since it had been shelved apart, staff had noticed greater usage of the materials.

### Circulation policies

In every case, the loan period for the leisure reading collection materials was the same as for the rest of the library. Loan periods ranged from 2 to 4 weeks, with various numbers of renewals allowed.

Only 'Quartier Libre' imposed a limit on the number of items that patrons were allowed to borrow from the leisure reading collection (up to four books and one DVD from the leisure reading collection, but no more than nine items from the regular and the leisure reading collections combined).

### Usage of the collection

It is difficult to determine how well these collections were used, because only some of the libraries collected circulation statistics for their leisure

reading collections, and of those that did, each did so in a different manner, making comparison between libraries difficult, if not impossible. However, the interviewees who had collected statistics felt that their collections were well used, especially in comparison with their regular, that is, non-leisure reading collections.

Otherwise, evidence for usage of the collections was largely anecdotal; several librarians mentioned seeing patrons use their collection's materials, especially during the lunch hour. This empirical evidence was actually felt by some to be more valuable than circulation statistics, since several interviewees mentioned that some of the materials, such as comic books, manga, magazines and newspapers, were used in the library and were probably only rarely checked out. None of the interviewees reported surveying patrons on their usage of, or desires for, the collection (although one interviewee planned to do so); however, as was mentioned above, all welcomed patron suggestions for purchase.

User demographics varied; while in all cases, making materials available to students was the collection's primary aim, students were not always its heaviest users. Medical students were Lux Humana's biggest users, but in the case of the Scott Memorial Library's collection, it was the faculty and staff who used it most often, and for the Intermed collection, it was the library staff, other staff and faculty at the campus, and those studying psychomotor rehabilitation and speech-language pathology.

The materials chosen by the patrons varied as well: philosopher Michel Foucault was one of the most popular authors in Lux Humana, while thriller writers David Baldacci, John Grisham, Stieg

**Table 4** Housing of the collections visited

| Name of collection                       | Where collection was located  | Comfortable seating provided   |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Aull Collection                          | Shelved apart but in same room as reference collection  | No                             |
| Dollie's Corner                          | Separate room   | Yes                            |
| Intermed                                 | Shelved apart   | Yes                            |
| Lux Humana                               | Shelved separately but on same floor as journals  | Yes                            |
| Medicine in Literature                   | Shelved apart   | Being ordered at time of visit |
| Quartier Libre                           | Separate room   | Yes                            |
| Scott Library Leisure Reading Collection | Separate room (and different floor), although newspapers were on the same floor as the stacks | Yes                            |



Larsson and James Patterson, and romance writers Nora Roberts and Danielle Steel were popular authors in the Scott Memorial Library collection; and the most popular authors in Intermed were bestselling authors Amélie Nothomb, Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt and Katherine Pancol; literary writer Marguerite Yourcenar; futuristic writer Jean-Michel Truong; manga author Osamu Tezuka; playwright Bertolt Brecht; and, once again, Stieg Larsson.

#### Readers' advisory

None of the interviewees reported much demand from students for readers' advisory; interviewees could think of few, if any, times that they had been asked for help in choosing materials. While the librarian responsible for the Medicine in Literature collection also reported very little demand for readers' advisory, she did state that a question from a student about how to identify books on cancer (after he was advised by a faculty member to read fiction on this topic) had led to the categorisation of the collection by health topic on the library's website.

Although the students using Quartier Libre did not request help in choosing materials, the staff using it did. Each week, library staff took a small number of books to the faculty/staff cafeteria. Many patrons who borrowed books from this temporary location asked for help in selecting materials. Several of these patrons had also stated that they preferred borrowing items from this smaller selection of items, because they felt that the librarian's having pulled the items from the larger collection made these more likely to be of interest.

#### Collection promotion

Libraries used many different methods to promote their collections. These included holding public readings, lectures or conferences relating to collection materials; maintaining a blog or sending out electronic or print newsletters promoting titles from the collection; facilitating a student book club; using the room housing the collection for events such as receptions and exhibits; allowing users to post ratings or reviews of books on the library website; and setting up displays of either new books or those on a particular theme.

#### Approaches to electronic content

No collection contained e-materials, nor did any interviewees have immediate plans to pursue acquisition of electronic content. Students at Northwestern University did have access to electronic newspapers, but demand continued for the print-format newspapers provided in Dollie's Corner.

Interviewees gave several reasons for not pursuing acquisition of electronic content. These included the lack of current and/or suitable electronic content, impermanence of content (e.g. expiring book licences), high costs of licensing online newspapers, preference among patrons for print content and lack of demand for electronic materials.

However, the librarian responsible for the Lux Humana collection did question whether there would be a movement away from print materials, because of the increasingly fragmented attention that digital multitasking can produce. She wondered whether young people 'have time, do they have patience, do they have energy to go deep into printed literature and behind the words?'

#### Value of the collection

Although many interviewees had seen patrons using the collection, only three interviewees had received comments from their patrons about its presence. The librarians responsible for Quartier Libre and the Medicine in Literature collection both felt that students were surprised, but pleased to see a leisure reading collection in their library. Indeed, the librarian responsible for the Medicine in Literature collection reported that current medical students often showed the collection to prospective medical students touring the campus. Students had also expressed their appreciation for the materials in Lux Humana and had indicated that it made it much easier for them to get access to reading materials.

Additionally, the librarian responsible for the Medicine in Literature collection felt that parents of prospective students seemed to enjoy seeing it, that perhaps these parents felt that their child 'should be a rounded person, so they like the idea that those things are accessible to them. I think they see it as a value-added collection'.

As for faculty reaction, library staff felt that faculty had been 'very supportive' of Lux Humana; they saw the ongoing financial support of the collection by the Faculty of Medicine and the cultural award bestowed on the library by the Finnish medical society Duodecim for setting up the collection, as indicative of the value faculty and practitioners placed upon it.

Although the interviewees had not received a great deal of verbal feedback from their patrons, they did believe that their leisure reading collection provided several benefits. Several spoke of the stress relief and relaxation afforded to readers by the collection. For example, the librarian responsible for Intermed stated that it helped medical students 'to stop and catch their breath' and that for his fellow library employees, the collection allowed them to 'leave their daily routine behind'. The librarian responsible for the Medicine in Literature collection said that she felt that the collection provided students with 'leisure, down time, stop reading a textbook, read something that just passes over your eyeballs for fun'. The librarian responsible for the Scott Memorial Library collection also mentioned that it was gratifying 'to know that it benefits somebody, even if it is someone who works in the cafeteria, the legal counsel or whatever, even if it might not necessarily be the students'. One of the authors of the study that led to the Medicine in Literature collection being established spoke of 'the capacity that literature has to take you away from stressful situations'.

Several interviewees saw their collections as an opportunity to introduce readers to new ideas or perspectives. Speaking of the student patrons of her library, the librarian responsible for Quartier Libre said, 'We are trying to open their minds to something other than their studies; they have the tendency to get very wrapped up in their studies, and perhaps this helps open their minds, makes them more curious. They can get manga and comic books elsewhere, but we notice with the DVD's that they don't necessarily choose the most accessible, or the best-known, films'. Similarly, the staff responsible for Lux Humana were hopeful that it would change medical students' 'way of thinking' and 'enlighten their souls'. The librarian responsible for Dollie's Corner felt that it was a place for people to 'get away and look at some-

thing new, different'. Citing her own reading experience, the librarian responsible for the Medicine in Literature collection said she felt that it gave students a chance to read and to be exposed to different ways of looking at things.

'[I have] travelled to places I couldn't possibly travel to, been inside people's minds that I couldn't possibly know and understand, and I think that's the value that they could take from it.'

One of the authors of the study that led to the Medicine in Literature collection being established felt that the collection had a potential role to play in helping readers to understand other people; he quoted T.S. Eliot saying, 'We read...because we cannot know enough people...'.<sup>27</sup>

The leisure reading collection was also seen as a way of drawing people into the library, of, in the words of the librarian responsible for the Scott Memorial Library collection, giving the library 'a more friendly personality'.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to look at the functioning of leisure reading collections in academic health sciences and science libraries. In many ways, these collections seem to function in a similar way to what has previously been reported in the literature on the functioning of leisure reading collections in other academic libraries.

The main difference seen in this study was that some health sciences collections described here were set up with the goal of inspiring changes in professional/personal behaviour, something not normally discussed in the leisure reading literature, but which has been seen in previous descriptions of collections in academic health sciences libraries.<sup>23</sup> In fact, other than promoting reading, the reasons that non-health academic libraries offer leisure reading collections are not often discussed.<sup>4,6</sup> This emphasis on changing perspectives led in some cases to a more focused, thematic collection, something not reported in the non-health leisure reading literature.

As well, students in the health professions are known to face difficult situations and hectic

schedules, while students in the sciences also often face a busy schedule including extensive time in the laboratory. In addition, students in both the sciences and health sciences may have little or no exposure to the literature (or social sciences) in their coursework. Perhaps, it is not surprising then, that in several of the interviews conducted for this study, the stress relief provided by the leisure reading collections was highlighted. This has not often been mentioned in other literature on leisure reading collections, although interestingly, one article did state that at one (multipurpose) library, a small number of pharmacy students enjoyed reading 'bodice-rippers' because they 'totally remove... [the students] from the classroom'.<sup>8</sup>

The main way that the science library collection, Quartier Libre, seemed to differ from the other collections discussed in this article was by having a greater focus on current events, although several other collections did provide readers with access to print news magazines and newspapers. While some of the health sciences libraries provided primarily medical-themed materials, several did not, so Quartier Libre, with its non-medical focus, did not differ in this regard.

In terms of differences between the European and the U.S. health sciences libraries, the former focused primarily, though not necessarily exclusively, on health-related materials, while two of the three U.S. libraries had a primarily recreational focus.

Several of the collections discussed here had benefited from external funding. This may be an interesting avenue to pursue for librarians interested in setting up (or maintaining) a collection at their own library.

## Conclusions

All librarians and library staff who were actively selecting materials for their collections felt that the collections were well used, and that their collections played a valuable role in their library. Additionally, despite the movement of books, magazines and newspapers to the online format, patrons at these libraries seem to continue to enjoy using print materials.

It would be interesting for future work to focus on the user opinion of such collections. Collecting data directly from library users was beyond the

scope of this project. However, such data would certainly help bolster the case for leisure reading collections being established (or even maintained) at more academic health sciences and science libraries.

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## Note

\* Chick lit is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'literature by, for, or about women; esp. a type of fiction, typically focusing on the social lives and relationships of young professional women, and often aimed at readers with similar experiences'. Oxford English Dictionary. [Internet]. Second edition, 1989; online version June 2011. Chick lit [cited 2011 Aug 22]. Available from: <http://www.oed.com>.

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## Appendix

Questions posed to interviewees at libraries visited

- 1 What led to the creation of the leisure reading collection at your library?
- 2 Which formats do you collect? E-books, films, magazines, non-fiction, genre fiction, etc.?
- 3 How big is your collection?
- 4 Is your collection well used? How do you measure that?
- 5 How are the materials (e.g., titles) selected?
- 6 What does it cost to provide the collection?
- 7 Who pays for the materials?
- 8 How are the materials classified? Are they shelved with the rest of the collection? Are they processed (e.g., dust jackets) in a different way?
- 9 What is the circulation policy?
- 10 How do students and faculty react to the presence of the collection?
- 11 What are your thoughts on the value/importance of the collection?
- 12 Do you get readers' advisory questions from users? How do you deal with them?
- 13 How do you promote the collection?
- 14 What future do you see for your leisure reading collection?
- 15 Do you know of other libraries that had leisure reading collections, but have discontinued them?
- 16 Other comments?

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