

HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANS AND HEALTH CARE REFORM

“Providing quality information for improved health”

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Quality health information underpins all aspects of health care. The Medical Library Association (MLA) and the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) believe that authoritative information is mission-critical to every health care enterprise. It is the foundation of all health care processes, including clinical care, biomedical research and the science of health care delivery, transformative health education, and the development of informed healthcare consumers. Health sciences librarians provide authoritative information in support of informed decision making to lower costs and reduce waste, improve health care quality and reduce medical errors, and enhance consumer choice.

Information for Health Care Providers

Information management skills and networks of information are essential for efficient and effective delivery of health care. Access to information reduces professional isolation and improves the quality of decision making. Studies of health professionals have shown that having access to evidence-based information improves patient care, reduces health care costs, and assists in prevention of malpractice litigation.

Health sciences librarians train tomorrow’s health care providers and biomedical researchers to retrieve, manage, and evaluate information effectively. They support the efforts of health professionals to be lifelong learners, and facilitate recruitment and retention of health professionals in underserved areas by serving as access points and guides to critical information.

Information for Health Care Consumers

Timely access to relevant health information and education to improve health literacy (ability to read, assimilate, and make decisions based on health information) can improve the quality of care and lower its cost. Low health literacy is linked to under-utilization of services, medication errors, increased hospitalizations, poor health outcomes, and higher healthcare costs. An informed and empowered patient plays a key role on the health care team and is critical to health care reform.

Health sciences librarians are a key component of health information access and literacy education. Opportunities exist for productive partnerships between health sciences librarians and librarians and staff in public libraries, public health departments, social service agencies, and community-based organizations to ensure universal consumer access to health and wellness information and health literacy education.

MLA and AAHSL Priorities

In the spirit of health care reform, MLA and AAHSL support the following priorities to ensure the delivery of quality information for improved health.

1. Formally include the health sciences librarian community in the discussion of health care reform based on their recognized expertise in collecting, organizing, and disseminating health information to support informed clinical decisions, biomedical research, and education of professionals and consumers.
2. Provide robust support of the nation's most important health sciences library on which all other health sciences libraries depend—the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM). Specifically, provide increased funding for NLM's critical national infrastructure of networks, databases, extramural grant programs, and information and education services, as well as its support of national Health Information Technology (HealthIT) efforts. NLM plays a critical role in building and supporting relationships for sharing all levels of health information.
3. Maintain transparency for federally funded biomedical research through support of the National Institutes of Health Public Access Policy and the recently re-introduced Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA) (S. 1373) that mandate public access to the published results of federally funded research. Such access is key to the advancement of scientific discovery and successful health outcomes by accelerating the translation of research results “from the bench to the bedside.”
4. Ensure that the developing HealthIT environment includes ready and transparent access to library resources in the Electronic Health Record (EHR) so health care providers can seamlessly link from a patient's EHR to the knowledge base of authoritative health information.
5. Support library network access for all health care providers, independent of physical location, affiliation, or setting. Universal access to quality information supports informed decision making.
6. Offer incentives to health care institutions to provide knowledge-based information resources and services through their libraries and librarians in support of local health care providers and consumers.
7. Support meaningful partnerships between health sciences librarians and a wide variety of local service organizations and institutions to provide consumers, patients, and families with access to authoritative resources and services for informed health care decisions.
8. Mandate that reimbursement plans be structured to include the full cost of providing information resources that support quality patient care, biomedical research, health professional education, and consumer health literacy.

Organizational Biographies

MLA is a nonprofit, educational organization, comprised of health sciences information professionals and institutions with more than 3,900 members worldwide. Through its programs and services, MLA provides lifelong education opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners to promote the importance of quality information for improved health to the health care community and the public.

AAHSL is composed of the directors of 116 libraries of accredited U.S. and Canadian medical schools, as well as 28 associate members. AAHSL's goals are to promote excellence in academic health sciences libraries and to ensure that the next generation of health practitioners is trained in information seeking skills that enhance the quality of healthcare delivery.