

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE MANITOBA HEALTH LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

Victor Hugo said "Greater than the tread of mighty armies is the idea whose time has come." So it has been with health libraries. As recently as ten years ago there were libraries connected with medical and nursing schools as an essential component of undergraduate programs, but there were few, if any, libraries committed to promoting learning at all levels of education and in all areas of health care. As the concept of continuing education grew in the early 1970's health institutions began to allocate maney [sic] for books and journals and library staff. Many library workers had little training or experience, knew nothing of medicine or nursing and worked on a part-time basis. Though their job descriptions listed them as "clerk," they were usually accorded the courtesy title of "librarian." It is to their credit that these "clerks" worked hard and diligently to acquire an amazing amount of practical knowledge.

In 1974 Audrey Kerr, Medical Librarian, University of Manitoba, with Isobel Steedman of the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation Library called several informal Meetings of as many health library workers as could be located. In October 1976 Rena Kroeker, Manitoba Association of Registered Nurses (MARN) Library, responded to a grassroots restlessness and called another meeting at MARN. Twenty-one attended and voted unanimously to organize on a formal basis, thus giving birth to the Manitoba Health Libraries Association (MHLA). An executive was elected, a committee appointed to draw up a constitution, and all members were asked to provide copies of their journal holdings for distribution to member libraries.

MHLA decided to have three meetings per year and in May of 1977 a constitution was adopted. It is interesting to note that a national health libraries association hold its' initial meeting in the same month as we did. Our aims, constitution and even name were designed to paralled theirs closely and, a good year later, in the fall 1978, we became the fourth provincial organization to be given chapter status in the Canadian health Libraries Association (CHLA). In 1978 Barbara Henwood, Medical Library, Health Sciences Centre, was elected as a member of the CHLA executive committee and Patrick Fawcett, Medical Library, University of Manitoba, became editor of the Association journal, Bibliotheca Medica Canadiana.

Though we are still only 42 members and have been in existence less than three years, we are an enthusiastic group and have undertaken several major projects, a few of which are described below.

In the spring of 1977 Sandra Langlands, Extension Librarian, Medical Library, University of Manitoba compiled a list of basic medical books necessary for a core library collection in small, rural hospitals. At the same time, several librarians from Winnipeg and Brandon hospitals and schools of nursing drew up a companion nursing list. Since these lists were widely used and appreciated an expanded updated list with four parts (medical, nursing, allied health, geriatric long-term care) has been compiled by many members of MHLA and will be available in June 1979.

In 1977 the Manitoba Health Organization Inc. (MHO) asked two health librarians to give a workshop for untrained hospital library personnel, particularly those working in rural hospitals. This workshop was offered under the auspices of MHLA at the annual Manitoba Health Conference and proved quite successful. So much so, in fact, that it was repeated in 1978

and will probably become an annual event, though its content and thrust may alter from year to year.

As library usage in all health facilities increased simultaneously with budgetary and personnel restraints, health librarians have pursued all possible avenues of cooperation for efficiency and economy. One such venture was the creation of Serials Holdings of Member Libraries, a computerized union list of serials. It includes the holdings of sixteen member libraries, has provision for easy and continual updating and, though recently published, is already proving invaluable. If you ask Barbara Henswood, the chairman of the Union List Committee, Susan Rogers, volunteer librarian on the project, or Patrick Fawcett, program designer, if they would have proceeded with the project had they initially known the amount of work and worry involved, I am not sure what their answer would be at this moment!

Because so many health library workers were valiantly coping without adequate experience or knowledge in library work, the need for some formal library education became apparent. After some negotiations, Red River Community College (RRCC) agreed to offer a 10 hour course, "Working in Health Libraries," as part of the second year Library Technician program. Rena Kroeker coordinated and instructed the course, with the moral and advisory support of MHLA, in January through April 1979. Fifteen individuals completed the course. Student evaluation indicated a high level of satisfaction and requested that the course be repeated every two or three years in a much expanded form.

With the completion of the RRCC course, the distribution of Serials Holdings of Member Libraries and the publication of the four-part core list, MHLA members are heaving a sigh of relief (or is it exhaustion?). We look at each other with a measure of pride and satisfaction, for we have worked very hard and, in spite of or because of, our diverse experience and educational backgrounds, we have drawn strength and inspiration from each other.

Now three years old, Manitoba Health Libraries Association has a distinct identity, a sense of purpose and a fair measure of confidence in its' role of unifying, educating [sic] and supporting health library workers.

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