Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success:

The Educational Policy Statement of the Medical Library Association

Executive Summary

_We must educate for the problems of a generation hence, not for the problems of today ... librarians must be imbued with the psychological ability to handle change and to live with ambiguity. Without this they will be performing tomorrow's tasks with yesterday's concepts._ —Estelle Brodman, 1979 [2]

Today, the management of information and knowledge in the health care environment is a national priority with increasing attention paid to evidence-based health care, patient safety and privacy, health literacy, and creation of electronic patient records. Technology has become central to the operation of every library.

The advancing biosciences research enterprise makes it necessary for professionals fulfilling health information roles to manage increasingly complex knowledgebases and data sets. These professionals may have a variety of titles including health information professional, health information specialist, informationist, medical librarian, informatician, or health sciences librarian. This policy statement refers to these professionals as health sciences librarians or health information professionals.

A Challenging Work Setting

MLA believes that lifelong learning must be a cornerstone of every individual's professional development plan to achieve success in the health sciences environment and that individuals must assume greater personal responsibility for defining their ongoing learning goals, increasing their competencies, and improving their professional performance. Consequently, the association has been offering professional continuing education courses for almost fifty years and has been involved in professional development programs and services for much longer [3].

Since this policy's precursor, "Platform for Change: the Educational Policy Statement of The Medical Library Association," the world of health information and health sciences librarianship has changed dramatically. The work of health sciences librarians takes place in an increasingly broader spectrum of settings and across a broad range of biosciences and health-related disciplines. Health sciences librarians function in ways shaped by a number of significant factors including: changing elements and structure of medical knowledge; rapid introduction of new technologies and techniques for information processing and dissemination; altered patterns of institutional organization, management, and governance; and the drive to maintain excellence. Health sciences librarianship stands apart in ensuring that knowledge about advances in the
science and technology of health care research and practice is readily accessible to health care professionals, educators, students, researchers, and the public.

Following are the seven professional competency areas needed by health sciences librarians today along with recommendations for actions that individuals and professional organizations, health sciences librarians, MLA, employers, graduate programs in library and information science, and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) can take to promote professional development and lifelong learning. In some competency areas, such as technology and systems management, new knowledge and skills have been added, while in others, specific knowledge and skills have been broadened to include, for example, diversity issues. Recommendations from the previous policy statement that were either acted upon or that are no longer relevant have been eliminated in this edition. Individuals cannot achieve mastery of all knowledge and every desirable skill in each competency area, but will emphasize different areas at different points in their careers and in different institutional settings.

Professional Competencies for Health Sciences Librarians

1. Understand the health sciences and health care environment and the policies, issues, and trends that impact that environment including:
   - current management and business practices
   - the parent organization's (academic medical center, hospital, government, corporate, etc.)
     major policy and program sources
   - the health sciences professions
   - the clinical care, research, medical education, cultural, ethical, economic, and legal issues
     and environments
   - various health and health-related organizations

2. Know and understand the application of leadership, finance, communication, and management theory and techniques including:
   - understanding the institution's mission and planning processes and the role of the library in the institution
   - forging and maintaining alliances with universities, public libraries, public health services, community-based organizations, and others to meet users' information needs
   - human resources management including recruitment, retention, staff development, and mentoring
   - facilities planning and space allocation
   - budgeting, cost analyses, and fund-raising
   - public relations, marketing, and advertising
   - library programs and services administration

3. Understand the principles and practices related to providing information services to meet users' needs including:
• the information needs of health practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, students, patients, consumers, and the general public
• the institution's information policies
• methods of information delivery and access including consideration of the specific information needs of diverse populations
• information services management

4. Have the ability to manage health information resources in a broad range of formats including:

• selection, acquisitions, and control of resources including the licensing of resources
• scholarly publishing, copyright, licensing, privacy, and intellectual property issues
• conservation, preservation, and archiving of materials in all formats
• cataloging, classification, abstracting, and thesaurus construction and knowledge representation
• national and international standards and conventions
• trends in information formatting, production, packaging, and dissemination

5. Understand and use technology and systems to manage all forms of information including:

• basic principles of automated systems, data standards, and systems analysis techniques including design and evaluation
• acquisition, use, and evaluation of information technologies
• integration of systems and technologies
• technological solutions for permanent access to electronic information
• applications in emerging areas of biomedicine computational biology and health information, including electronic health care systems and records
• communications and information infrastructure including the Internet and Web

6. Understand curricular design and instruction and have the ability to teach ways to access, organize, and use information including:

• adult learning theory and cognitive psychology
• educational needs assessment, analysis, and evaluation
• instructional methodologies, technologies, and systems design
• management of education services

7. Understand scientific research methods and have the ability to critically examine and filter research literature from many related disciplines including:

• using quantitative and qualitative methodologies and techniques and their interpretation
• locating, organizing, and critically evaluating the research literature
• using principles of evidence-based practice to support decision making
• conducting research and reporting and disseminating research findings either individually or in interdisciplinary research teams

Summary Recommendations for Action

Individuals and professional organizations

1. develop strategies to recruit a diverse and talented cadre of information professionals
2. provide new opportunities in the continuum of learning
3. continue educating the educators

Health sciences librarians

1. aggressively seek lifelong education and professional development opportunities from a variety of sources and design and implement a plan for continuing professional development
2. exercise leadership in and contribute to the professional development of the field
3. uphold and advocate for the values of the profession and apply them to changing information environments

The Medical Library Association

1. sets the standards for professional competency to assist employers in recruiting and retaining individuals who will be successful in the changing arena of health sciences librarianship
2. continues its leadership role in creating a vital and responsive professional development program and a dynamic set of coordinated education opportunities
3. collaborates with all participants in the educational arena
4. promotes adoption or development of staff development programs for information professionals by employers
5. maintains its formal liaison with the graduate schools of library and information science education
6. designs and implements a research agenda that advances the professional knowledgebase

Employers of health sciences librarians

1. recruit competent and promising individuals and involve them in meeting the information needs of the institution
2. place a high priority on staff development

Library and information science educators

1. lay a broad foundation that stresses theory over application, places librarianship in context with other related disciplines, fosters professional values, and prepares students to design their own learning program throughout the length of their careers
2. support students who desire to work in a health sciences setting by offering flexible options for students to gain necessary skill sets
3. provide a range of programs and opportunities that meet needs throughout a professional career, rather than focus solely on the master's degree
4. provide the impetus and forum for continued education of the educators

The National Library of Medicine

1. continues to identify future directions and priorities for its activities to support the educational needs of health sciences librarians
2. provides additional training opportunities for health sciences librarians to acquire new knowledge and skills, such as through identifying and funding centers of excellence for advanced training in health information at strategic points across the country

References