Medical Information -- When Limited Access Can Have Life Changing Consequences

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Medical Information – When Limited Access Can Have Life Changing Consequences

by Sally Patrick (Outreach Librarian, Utahealthnet Project Director, Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library; Phone: 801-581-6979) <spatrick@lib.med.utah.edu>

There is no subject where information being current, accurate and thoroughly validated is as critical as it is with medical information.

Health professionals including Physicians Assistants, social workers, nurses, dieticians, psychologists and others often work independently, without access to a hospital or academic library. Nowhere is there a group of users who, as librarians, should concern us more. For many, their only access to the journal literature may be through their public libraries.

Consumers of health information — which is all of us — want the best and most complete information when dealing with health and medical issues. They may or may not want to look at scholarly research materials — but, if they do, they should be able to.

Eccles Library is working very hard to “reach out” to everyone and bridge that gap because we believe access to health information is critical for all and there is a great deal out there that is evidence-based that most people can get to. There is a toll-free phone line (866-581-5534) for state residents that rings on the Eccles reference desk. Eccles has started UHID, a document delivery direct-to-the-consumer service which is available to all citizens of the state for materials in Eccles’ collection. This service, unlike traditional ILL services from many health sciences libraries, is free to the end user.

The “Eccles Outreach” Web page lists services which are available for each clientele. We encourage libraries and library users throughout the state to use them:

The “primary route to reaching consumers all over the state is a partnership with public libraries.”

The “O” (Outreach) Team

In the delivery of health related information to consumers and independent professionals, a partnership between academic health sciences libraries and public libraries is mission-critical for both.

To work with public libraries and other groups, Eccles Library formed the Outreach Services team to offer “information access, service and innovation by working with Utah communities not located on University of Utah campuses.”

Utahealthnet — http://utahealthnet.org

Utahealthnet was begun in 2005 as part of a National Library of Medicine grant to form a Utah Consumer Health Information Infrastructure. This project has two major goals:

1) To create a consumer health collaboration statewide around Eccles Library, public libraries, health departments and community-based health information providers. Currently Utahealthnet is comprised of over 30 such partnerships. The core partners who joined Utahealthnet at its start are: the Utah Department of Health, the Utah Telehealth Network and the Utah State Library Division. Most notably, the Eccles Library extends its outreach through a strong partnership with the University of Utah’s Health Sciences Center of Excellence in Women’s Health, Community Health Centers statewide and Utah Navajo Health System, Inc.

University of Utah Students and Faculty (top)

http://library.med.utah.edu

• Access to Reference Services — http://library.med.utah.edu/asklibrarian.php
• Renew Library Materials Checked-Out to You — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/services/renew.php
• Request an Article or Book
• Request Library Services — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/requests.php
• Library Classes — http://registration.med.utah.edu/classes.cfm?textonly=false
• University of Utah Continuing Education: Distance Education Services — http://continue.utah.edu/distance/index.php/

Utah Health Care Professionals (top)

http://library.med.utah.edu/or/#top

• Access to Reference Services — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/asklibrarian.php
• Request an Article or Book
• Request Library Services — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/requests.php
• Library Classes — http://registration.med.utah.edu/classes.cfm?textonly=false

Utah Health Information Consumers (top)

http://library.med.utah.edu/or/#top

• Consumer Health Links: Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library — http://library.med.utah.edu/km/chealth.php
• Access to Reference Services — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/asklibrarian.php
• Request an Article or Book
• Request Library Services — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/requests.php
• Library Classes — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/classes.cfm?textonly=false
• Library Classes for Communities — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/oteam/classes.php (Off-campus classes Guidelines) — http://library.med.utah.edu/or/oteam/offcampusclasses.php
• Utah Public Pioneer — http://pioneer.utah.gov/ (Check out the Health section!)

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“Free to All” Made Possible by an Academic/Public Library Collaboration

by Barbara G. Preece (Executive Director, Boston Library Consortium, Inc., 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02117; Phone: 617-262-6244 <bpreece@blc.org>

The Boston Library Consortium is an academic and research library consortium that bridges successfully the gap between academic and public libraries in both directions — since its very beginnings in 1970 the resources of the Boston Public Library have been available to the consortium’s constituency throughout New England.

And now, with its Open Content Alliance (OCA) project — it will be working in the other direction — as the first large library consortium to announce a self-funded partnership with a major digitalizing project, the OCA, the Boston Library Consortium is providing materials with none of the restrictions that apply to materials scanned by Google or Microsoft.

Boston Library Consortium

The Boston Library Consortium, Inc. (BLC) is an association of 19 academic and research libraries located throughout New England. Founded in 1970 at the behest of the graduate school deans, the Consortium is dedicated to sharing human and information resources to advance the research and learning of its constituency. The Consortium supports resource sharing and enhanced user services through programs in cooperative collecting, access to electronic resources and physical collections, and expedited interlibrary loan and document delivery. This year the Consortium entered a new partnership with the Internet Archive (IA) to digitize materials in its collections. Among the leaders of this project is the esteemed Boston Public Library, which quickly identified collections for the projects and also provided space to house the Northeast Regional Scanning Center.

Boston Public Library

Founded in 1848, the Boston Public Library (BPL) was the first large free municipal library in the United States. The present Copley Square location has been home to the library since 1895, when architect Charles Follen McKim completed his “palace for the people.” In 1972 the library expanded its Copley Square location with the opening of an addition designed by Philip Johnson. Today, the McKim building houses the BPL’s vast research collection and the Johnson Building holds the circulating collection of the general library and serves as headquarters for the Boston Public Library’s 26 branch libraries. Home to the library of John Quincy Adams, second president of the United States, the BPL is the only public library in the country that also serves as a Presidential Library.

The BPL, one of the first members of the Consortium, also serves as home to the BLC offices, and provides the Consortium’s constituency through a variety of services including resource sharing, cooperative collection development and a consortium card program that allows students/faculty/staff from the member libraries to use the vast resources of the BPL.

BLC and BPL join OCA:

Most recently, the Consortium including the Boston Public Library joined together to work with the Internet Archive’s Open Content Alliance. The Open Content Alliance (http://www.opencontentalliance.org/) represents the collaborative efforts of a group of cultural, technological, nonprofit, and governmental organizations from around the world that will help build a permanent archive of multilingual digitized text and multimedia content. The Internet Archive is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that was founded in 1996 to build an Internet library, with the purpose of offering permanent access for researchers, historians, and scholars to historical collections that exist in digital format.

According to Brewster Kahle, digital librarian and founder of the Internet Archive, “Fortunately many great libraries are weighing the alternatives and choosing to go open instead of putting public domain material under perpetual restrictions.”

The BLC and its member libraries, including the Boston Public Library, have partnered with the Open Content Alliance to build a freely accessible library of digital materials from the 19 member libraries. The Consortium will provide high resolution, downloadable, reusable files of public domain materials. The digitization efforts, using scanning technology from the Internet Archive, are based in a scanning center housed at the Boston Public Library. The Northeast Digital Scanning Center was unveiled on September 20, 2007. BPL President Bernard Margolis said, “The Boston Public Library is pleased to host this innovative collaborative effort. It is exciting to see the application of the latest in digital scanning technology of the Internet Archive to the enormous task of converting the rich book collections of the BLC libraries for easy access by people around the world. We are, in the most basic and important meaning of the word, “enriching” the world. As we open these books we give opportunity for their use in many new and expanding ways for new and expanding audiences. We are doing what libraries as supposed to do.”

In addition, the Eccles Health Sciences Library is also a Regional Medical Library for the MidContinental Region in the National Network of Libraries of Medicine MidContinental Region that also has a commitment to provide outreach services to Utah communities.

Conclusions

Putting all these resources together doesn’t solve the problem unless someone solves the “last mile” issue — getting the information into the hands of those who need it.

This will be accomplished through public libraries — in a partnership between academic/public libraries to best serve all of the users of all our library systems. 

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2) To create an up-to-date consumer health information portal for Utah.

The primary route to reaching consumers all over the state is a partnership with public libraries. One of the ways this is done, primarily for rural public libraries is through the “Quick Links” off the Utah State Library Division’s Homepage. Citizens seeking health information are directed to UtahHealthnet as their default search. Since Utah is a rural state, the T-1 high speed Internet access provided in public libraries is often a rural citizen’s lifeline to accurate, up to date health information.

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