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The National Library of Medicine: 175 Years of Information Innovation

by Maria E. Collins (Technical Information Specialist, Public Services Division, National Library of Medicine)

and Martha R. Fishel (Chief, Public Services Division, National Library of Medicine)

and John Doyle (Technical Information Specialist, Systems Office, Technical Services Division, National Library of Medicine)

The year 2011 marks the 175th anniversary of the National Library of Medicine. NLM started as a small collection in the office of the U.S. Army Surgeon General. Today, NLM, as part of the National Institutes of Health, is the world’s largest medical library and the producer of electronic information resources used by millions of people around the world every day.

NLM has changed the way scientific and medical information is organized, stored, accessed, and disseminated through its technical innovation, partnerships, and early adoption of the Internet. For example, the library has developed databases and software tools that make it easy to find medical literature and health information; enable scientists to study genes and their roles in the disease; and provide emergency responders with critical information to handle disasters.

NLM’s leadership of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, a collaborative partnership with over 2,000 books to healthcare professionals and libraries affected by disasters.

The idea for the Emergency Access Initiative developed in regular meetings between NLM and a small group of publishers following the widespread devastation in the Gulf Coast caused by Hurricane Katrina and Rita in 2005. Access to medical literature and information resources was lost or severely restricted by the damage to hospital and academic medical libraries which serve healthcare professionals in the region.

The primary goal of the Emergency Access Initiative is to provide free, full-text access to key medical and scientific journals most useful to healthcare professionals and librarians responding to a disaster, and to serve as a temporary replacement to library collections damaged or rendered inaccessible following a disaster. EAI can also be used by healthcare professionals responding to disaster and post-disaster medical issues of the affected population.

The Emergency Access Initiative is not an open-access collection — it is intended only for those affected by the disaster or assisting the affected population.

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PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Worked in the UCLA library system, at VTLS, and KPMG. At NLM, I am the team lead for DOCLINE and the Emergency Access Initiative.

PHILOSOPHY: “The ideal man bears the accidents of life with dignity and grace, making the best of circumstances.” Aristotle: “Great is the man who has not lost his childlike heart.” Mencius: “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” Leonardo da Vinci: “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” Philo

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Increasing move to electronic only publishing and use of electronic resources. The electronic environment provides great advantages, but also will pose increasing difficulty in resource sharing due to publisher license restrictions, elimination of print collections, and tightened collections budget. Overall, reduced budgets will result in additional library consolidations and prioritizing of services, and innovation to meet user needs.

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The Emergency Access Initiative (EAI) has been utilized in four separate regional disasters — Haiti (earthquake), Pakistan (flooding), Haiti (cholera), and Japan (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear event). During each of these events, the site received from 2,000 to 8,000 visitors who viewed thousands of articles and book chapters. The mostly commonly accessed materials were on emergency medicine, drug reference books, and for the Japanese period, materials on radiation. The Emergency Access Initiative (EAI) is a partnership of private, public, and government entities that resulted in a humanitarian service that provides free access to biomedical literature for health care professionals, students, and other users of health science libraries in the United States and internationally (eai.nlm.nih.gov). The initial period of free access is four weeks, which may be extended by the activation team as they evaluate conditions and biomedical literature needs in the affected area.

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The National Library of Medicine (NN/LM) for interlibrary loan, and emergency medicine and public health associated articles recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Additionally, core medical reference works, as well as books about emergency medicine and public health, were recommended for inclusion based upon input from librarians and medical personnel consulted on the project.

A three-person team with representatives from NLM, the publishers, and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine serve as the activation team for the Emergency Access Initiative — deciding whether a particular event will trigger EAI. For the purposes of the EAI project, a “disaster” is a naturally-occurring or man-made event that disrupts access to biomedical literature for health care professionals, students, and other users of health science libraries in the United States and internationally (eai.nlm.nih.gov). The initial period of free access is four weeks, which may be extended by the activation team as they evaluate conditions and biomedical literature needs in the affected area.

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5. Journals must have all of their parts in place including covers, tables of contents, advertisements, and administrative matter.

6. Commitment data will be recorded in the institutional section of DOCLINE. NLM’s online request routing and referral system.

As MedPrint participation grows, NLM will work with OCLC on exchanging print retention information between WorldCat and DOCLINE.


Digital Developments

NLM’s Digital Repository — by John Doyle

The National Library of Medicine launched its new digital repository, Digital Collections at http://collections.nlm.nih.gov, in autumn 2010. Digital Collections allows rich searching, browsing, and presentation of monographs and films from NLM’s historical collections. Users can perform full-text and faceted keyword searching across the range of content in the repository. Digital Collections uses a suite of open-source and NLM-created software, with the Fedora Commons Repository as the underlying framework. The repository facilitates the long-term preservation of the content by describing, verifying, and managing the ingested files using XML and RDF technologies. The repository also makes use of NLM’s offsite co-location data-center for redundant storage and distribution of access services.

Digital Collections contains a growing number of digitized books in the Public Domain, which are therefore freely available to read and download. The books are currently presented in two collections: Cholera Online, consisting of 518 monographs dating from the 19th century about cholera pandemics of that period, and Medicine in the Americas, NLM’s in-house digitization project which will eventually number approximately 6,000 volumes, demonstrating the evolution of American medicine from colonial frontier outposts of the 17th century to research hospitals of the 20th century. The books are displayed through an integrated viewer which provides within-book search, thumbnail preview of all pages and page zooming/rotating. Digital Collections also contains 29 historical films which can be downloaded in a variety of video formats to accommodate a wide range of playback devices, including mobile devices. The films are also playable via an integrated, Flash-based video player which allows full-text search of a film’s transcript and graphically displays where the searched word or phrase occurs within the timeline of the film. Additional content, including other format types, will be added over time.

PubMed Central

PubMed Central (PMC) is a free archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature at NLM. In keeping with NLM’s legislative mandate to collect and preserve the biomedical literature, PMC serves as a digital counterpart to NLM’s extensive print journal collection. Launched in February 2000, PMC was developed and is managed by NLM’s National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI).

Free Access: A Core Principle of PMC

As an archive, PMC is designed to provide permanent access to all of its content, even as technology evolves and current digital literature formats potentially become obsolete. NLM believes that the best way to ensure the accessibility and viability of digital material over time is through consistent and active use of the archive. For this reason, free access to all of its journal literature is a core principle of PMC.

How Journal Articles are Provided to PMC

PMC is a repository for journal literature deposited by participating publishers, as well as for author manuscripts that have been submitted in compliance with the Public Access Policy mandated by NIH and similar policies of other research funding agencies. PMC is not a publisher and does not publish journal articles itself.

A number of journals that joined PMC prior to 2008 benefited from NLM’s back issue digitization project, offered to publishers whose archival content was not yet available in electronic form. By scanning back issues from Volume 1 that were available only in print, NLM has helped create a complete digital archive of these 90 journals in PMC.

International Collaboration and Durability

NLM is collaborating internationally with other agencies that share the goals of PMC. Maintaining copies of PMC’s literature in other reliable international archives that operate on the same principles provides greater protection against damage or loss of the material.

Conclusion

NLM’s rich collection of print and digital resources has grown significantly over the past 175 years, and the Library looks forward to the next 175 years and more of collecting, providing access to, preserving, and recording the world’s most important materials in medicine and health.

Rumors

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Some more non-attendees updates. Arnaud Pelle<A.Pelle@emeraldinsight.com> couldn’t make it but he was following the Conference through Twitter and the Conference Website. Technology! BTW, did you see the great interview Arnaud did with yours truly? http://www.emeraldinsight.com/librarians/info/interviews/strach.htm

Arlene Sievers Hill wasn’t at the Charleston Conference either. She tells me that she had surgery and was out for six weeks! Plus there was a reorganization at Case Western. On the plus side, Arlene says she spoke at the ALPSP International Conference in Oxfordshire about changes in acquisitions and university libraries and how these changes are affecting publishers. She may be writing a book soon!