

DEPARTMENTS

Editor's message

Greetings from the sunny Middle East, and welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of the Canadian Health Libraries Association / Le journal de l'Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada* (JCHLA / JABSC)! This is the first issue with both our new name and our new look. We're very excited about the changes, and we hope you'll like them, too.

After a request for proposals, we selected NRC Research Press to produce the new journal. The staff at the NRC has been extremely helpful; they produce a very professional product and have been most patient with me while I continue to find my way in this new position. We have also bid a fond farewell, with thanks, to Dorothy Davey, who devoted a great deal of time and effort to the "care and feeding" of *Bibliotheca Medica Canadiana*. While that baby has now left home, I'm looking forward to seeing JCHLA / JABSC take its first steps toward maturity. We hope you all will continue to make your invaluable contributions to our community of colleagues by publishing your research with us, helping us make JCHLA / JABSC as popular as its predecessor.

This year, we've decided to try something a little unusual. After accepting the post of editor, I also accepted a post in the Persian Gulf as director of the National Medical Library of the United Arab Emirates. Rather than resign the editor's post, I offered to stay on, and the other members of the editorial board and the executive of the Canadian Health Libraries Association (CHLA) agreed to let me. We're hoping this will lend an international flavour to the journal and that it will allow us to further encourage contributions from outside of Canada.

In spite of some communication difficulties, a rather large time zone separation, and a big difference in the work week (in the Middle East, our work week begins on Saturday and ends on Wednesday), the editorial team and the CHLA board have been enormously supportive, and we've managed to put together a novel collaboration. All production, communication, and collaboration will take place in the virtual environment. The distance between us has shrunk to the width of a computer cable, and our various locations have become irrelevant. So, while I put up with the heat, dust, and camels, I'll try to refrain from waxing nostalgic about snow. I hear it's been a tough winter for all of you.

My experience living and working as a librarian in the Middle East has, so far, been very challenging and exciting. In many ways, the challenges are the same as in Canada; there's never enough funding, faculty complain when we don't have their favourite journal, computers act up, and we're short-staffed. The staff is some of the best I've worked with; their very differences remind me daily that, at heart, we are all the same. A multitude of countries are represented in our offices — India, Syria, Pakistan, Sudan, Iraq, and of course Canada. At any given time during the day, you can hear English, Urdu, Hindi, French or Arabic (to name a few) spoken in the library with some people switching comfortably and quickly among several of these languages.

Some challenges come with a twist. I was told when I arrived that we had Ariel in our document delivery department. "Well, there's one problem I won't have to deal with," I thought — except that no one thought to tell me that we *had* it, but we hadn't quite figured out how to *use* it. (It seems we have a small issue with the firewall. *Plus ça change*, eh?) I didn't find this out until months later, when we tried to set up accounts with the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information and the US National Library of Medicine. Serves me right. Whether or not Ariel was *working* wasn't what I asked. I learned very quickly how to identify and ask the *right* question — clearly and succinctly. If brevity is the soul of wit, I'm now the Shakespeare of Al Ain.

In spite of some things that have brought me up short in astonishment since my arrival — both good and bad — I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. I hope that some of the lessons I'm learning here will help me be not only a better librarian but also a better human being. I am so grateful to the membership and board of CHLA, my fellow editors, and my colleagues at the W.K. Kellogg Health Sciences Library at Dalhousie for supporting me in this venture. I'm also very grateful to the staff here at the National Medical Library for teaching me some lessons about international cooperation and to the small community of expatriate librarians — many of them Canadians — who call and e-mail me with advice, support, and the cadences of an accent from home to keep me grounded. My thanks to all, and I'm looking forward to the coming issues of JCHLA / JABSC.

Karen Neves