

IN FOCUS / EN PROFONDEUR

Featuring: *Elisheba Muturi*

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Degrees and professional designations held: BSc, MSc, MAS, MLIS.*



1. Tell us about your current position.

I work in a non-traditional role, embedded in a team of pharmacists in the BC Ministry of Health Services, Pharmaceutical Services Division. I support both clinical evidence-based prescribing and consumer education initiatives to promote optimal medication use. The position entails:

- clinical research and knowledge translation: assisting and conducting literature searches to provide evidence to support drug therapy decisions, literature scanning topics of interest;
- providing instruction in bibliographic management and other knowledge management skills
- creating tools to support dissemination of research findings to clinicians – such as creating electronic communities of practice for pharmacists and doctors;
- translating research findings into plain language for dissemination to consumers and patients to promote health literacy; and
- building relationships in the community with different consumer groups to facilitate knowledge transfer.

2. What do you find most interesting about your work?

My job is interesting and diverse, utilizing a vast array of my skills and experience. I enjoy the diversity of being involved in both the clinical and consumer components of our research and knowledge dissemination. Particularly rewarding is my role in:

- Ensuring plain-language translation of information going to the public and creating awareness among

bureaucrats about the need for consumer-friendly information.

- Combining my Ministry of Health affiliation and part-time public librarian position to bridge the gap between clinical and consumer health. I am able to foster liaison between Ministry of Health, other government programs, libraries, schools, immigrant services, seniors' centres, and family programs in order to promote health literacy in the community. I seek opportunities to promote the role of libraries and health librarians among the diverse constituents who I work with.

I find connecting with consumers rewarding – determining how and when to best engage the public on health topics. One of my fun projects was designing a campaign to educate parents and caregivers on the safe management of coughs and colds in children under 5 years old. This was in line with the evidence and Health Canada's directive that cough and cold medication was dangerous for this age group. Reaching the target audience for this age group entailed face-to-face presentations at library story times, community centres, and health fairs. To broaden our reach, we are currently exploring the use of technology and social media tools for public engagement.

3. What has been your greatest professional challenge?

In venturing into such a non-traditional role, I have occasionally been concerned about my identity as a librarian and being recognized as such by my peers. For example, due to the tendency of pigeonholing, I wonder about the ease of getting into an academic library if I were interested. It has been a paradox because on the one hand librarians are not always taken as seriously as they should be. In my team, do I want to be identified as such or simply valued for my contributions, title notwithstanding? Yet, when my colleagues are impressed by my skills, I want to "brag" about the variety of things that librarians can do!

A challenge in my current work environment is that while my work informs policy and decision-making, economic constraints often limit the ability to truly apply the evidence. Unlike research and academia, government can be a somewhat restrictive environment where bureaucracy tends to stifle innovation.

4. How did you become interested in medical librarianship?

I first developed an interest in health when I did my master's in international development (I studied global health policy and wrote a dissertation on HIV/AIDS

prevention in Africa). Later on during my MLIS course at UBC, taking the health librarianship course unearthed the wealth of opportunities in both clinical and consumer health information. Assisting with health research projects at UBC also helped shape my interest. From my summer internship at the International Development Research Centre, I saw how librarianship could intersect with my interest in international development and global health. On graduation, I was unable to relocate for global health opportunities but my current position in a Ministry of Health is a good opportunity to utilize my skills and pursue my interest in health. Through professional development and hands-on-experience, I have honed my skills in critical appraisal of the literature and creation of evidence summaries and increased my ability to synthesize literature to make policy recommendations.

5. What was your background before you became a medical librarian?

I started my career in Kenya where I worked in communication, publishing, and libraries, organizing book fairs and literacy promotion activities at the national and regional level. I believed that the local publishing industry needed to develop in order to provide relevant content to support literacy and literary development. At the time, the publishing industry focused on textbook publishing because low discretionary incomes, emphasis on oral culture, and an exam-oriented educational system limited the demand for leisure reading material. We sought to promote the publishing industry and a reading culture through a Book Development Council, organization of local and regional book fairs, and grant-funded distribution programs.

I later studied international development in the UK after which I was involved in health research and community program development. I continue to have a particular interest in global health and evidence-based practice in developing countries.

6. What would you be doing if you weren't a librarian?

Community development in one form or another as this is an area that I am passionate about. This theme is evident in my career path so far.

7. What do you think is the most interesting issue in the library field (medical libraries or more general) today?

Like other librarians, health/medical librarians need to adapt quickly to maintain their relevance in a fast-changing environment or they risk obsolescence. The emphasis on evidence-based medicine means that the demand for access to the evidence should transform the role of librarians into central players in medical decision-making but for some reason it is not translating into better recognition of and demand for librarians – at least not significantly. Similarly, the emergence of patient-centered care where patients are encouraged to be active participants in their care should translate into key roles for consumer health librarians providing health information in accessible languages and formats – but this is not happening. Notably and sadly, health literacy initiatives rarely involve public or other health librarians. Addressing this disconnect is essential in fully optimizing health librarians'

contributions to clinical care and consumer empowerment while raising librarians' profiles.

8. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

- Making a successful transition when I moved from Kenya to Canada – often a challenge for immigrant professionals.
- Writing a grant proposal that resulted in the funding for two ehealth centres in Western Kenya.
- Most recently, the proud mum of a delightful baby girl.

9. Whom do you admire?

Mary-Doug Wright, a health librarian in BC, Principal of Apex Information. I admire her for her courage in venturing into and succeeding in the world of independent information professionals. She is highly regarded in BC for her work in supporting health services planning and policy, and health technology assessment. I have had the privilege of having her as a mentor, for which I am very grateful.

10. What other organizations are you involved in?

The Cochrane Consumer Network, BC's Patient Voices Network, HIFA2015 (Health Information for All) Forum.

11. Is there anything about you that your colleagues might be surprised to know?

I have been learning sign language – American Sign Language first and now, Kenyan Sign Language. My husband and I are involved in a ministry outreach program in the deaf community, which we find deeply rewarding.

12. Tell us about some of your hobbies.

Photography, classical music, reading biographies, and culinary arts.

13. What is your favourite place in Canada, and why?

The Butchart Gardens in Victoria are stunningly beautiful in the summer.

14. What advice would you give to a new member of CHLA or someone new to the field?

I can think of two points:

1. New and indeed all librarians ought to be flexible and to dare to venture outside the box of traditional health librarianship. They may be surprised to discover fascinating opportunities. When I graduated, I was eager to work in health librarianship but found that there were very few traditional opportunities such as in academic libraries. Unable to relocate, I knew I needed to become more creative in my job search. I was convinced that there were opportunities that could utilize my searching, synthesis and analysis skills outside of traditional library environments. I started to look closely at Ministry of Health positions for analyst job descriptions and realized that these were a good match. They were looking for professionals who were skilled in searching for and synthesizing information and knowledge translation for use in decision and policy-making. What was interesting is that many MLIS students did not think of these positions and

the public service did not realize that librarians had these skills.

2. It is essential to get involved in your local chapter. As most chapters have small memberships, they may have difficulty filling executive positions. These positions may not have the visibility and prominence associated with national positions but they are obviously vital for the growth and support of the profession. Needless to say, healthy chapters are the backbone of a robust CHLA. I served on the HLABC for a few years and was rewarded with the “Emerging Leader” recognition for my humble contribution.

15. What are your plans for the future?

I am very interested in the intersection of global health and emerging technologies. I am working on my grant-writing skills, which are an asset in this area.

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