

## IN FOCUS / EN PROFONDEUR

### Featuring: Liz Bayley

*Director (retired), Health Sciences Library, McMaster University,  
Degrees and professional designations held: BA, MLS*



Liz Bayley served as Director of McMaster University's Health Sciences Library for 5.5 years before her retirement on 1 July 2013. We interviewed her before her departure.

#### **Tell us about your career before becoming Director of the Health Sciences Library.**

I have been at the Health Sciences Library since 1986, first as Head of Cataloguing, adding Head of Systems and Curriculum Integration Coordinator to my title in 1992, then becoming Head of Collections, Systems and Technical Services – Nursing Liaison Librarian in 2005. I actually did my undergraduate degree in French and Russian at McMaster and taught English for a year in Bordeaux, France, before completing my MLS at Western. I worked for the Department of Finance – Treasury Board Secretariat and for the Bank of Canada, and I returned to McMaster Libraries in 1982 as a cataloguer in the University Library. One of my projects was to catalogue Bertrand Russell's personal library.

#### **McMaster has long had a solid reputation for pushing the boundaries in terms of evidence-based medicine and a well-defined role for the library. How has that relationship helped to clarify and expand the role of health sciences librarians?**

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is really the health sciences' take on information literacy, so using the EBP terminology and approach has made the library skills relevant to the faculty and students. McMaster is also strong in problem-based and inquiry-based learning, both

of which require the integration of information seeking, evaluation, and application. All of these approaches apply the same principles and aim to achieve the same outcomes. We are very fortunate to work in such a receptive environment.

#### **What do you find most interesting about your work?**

The variety. The Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster is a very dynamic and innovative institution with major initiatives in education, research, and clinical care. The Health Sciences Library reports directly to the Faculty and supports its work in all three areas. We are located in a Health Sciences Centre, which we share with a Children's Hospital – in fact we also provide library services to the staff in that hospital. I am never bored.

#### **You have been the Director of one of the most active health sciences libraries in Canada. How do you see your role as a leader?**

Leadership in my case is appropriately constrained by the role of the library and by the responsibilities of the Director. These responsibilities go up the organization chart to the Faculty Administration and down to the staff of the library. As the Director I need to demonstrate to my administration the core value of the library in its support of the mission of the Faculty, which translates into their support in terms of budget – it's all about the money! At the same time, I need to give opportunities to my staff to help them build their skills and stay motivated, while setting an example.

#### **What one thing would you like to be remembered for in your career as a health sciences librarian?**

Helping to define and enable the role of librarians in evidence-based practice, both in support of health care training and delivery and in support of their own practice.

#### **What has been your greatest professional challenge?**

Continuing to show the value of libraries and librarians. I don't believe we should change the names and titles – why as an institution and a profession do we not take ownership of these words? We just need to stay nimble and relevant.

#### **What do you think health sciences librarianship will look like in the future? How have our roles changed since you began working in this field?**

I really don't think our essential roles have changed, just the tools we use to support those roles. For example, meta-tagging is just indexing with a sexier label. The web has

certainly provided us with a wonderful way to deliver our services and resources, letting us work busily at the back end to organize and provide access directly to our patrons. The challenge is that we can make this access so seamless and reliable that we become transparent.

**You've been involved in CHLA/ABSC in many roles over your career. Can you talk about your history with the association, and share any thoughts on what your involvement has meant to you?**

I first became involved in CHLA/ABSC when I joined the Health Sciences Library in 1986. Tom Flemming was the editor of the association's journal, which was then called *Biblioteca Medica Canadiana*, and which I helped to proofread. My first CHLA conference was in Halifax in 1988; I was part of an information technology panel and spoke about my experience of setting up the first public computers in my library – IBM 5155s, called “portables” but actually “luggables” (see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR9ur\\_tOGvM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR9ur_tOGvM)). I have since attended 20 more CHLA/ABSC conferences, helping to organize four of them including the first joint conference with MLA held in Vancouver in 2000. In the mid-1990s, Anna Gagliardi, the editor of *BMC*, and I created and maintained the first association website, using our newly acquired HTML coding skills. CHLA/ABSC has been my primary library association for over 25 years, and although technology has revolutionized our jobs and our lives, the importance of such a strong community of Canadian health library practice remains the same.

**Who do you admire as a leader in our field, and why?**

Ann McKibbin. I have had her as a friend and a colleague for over 30 years. She has taught me about research methods, evidence-based practice, knowledge translation, and health informatics. She teaches, she conducts research, and she publishes and presents, all in a low key but highly effective way. Ann has constantly kept

herself on the leading edge and sought out opportunities to utilize her amazing skills and knowledge.

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

I am actually a very shy and retiring person and somewhat lazy, so I constantly have to push myself to take on challenges. However, the results have been rewarding and worth the nervous energy expended.

I have been with my husband for 27 years and married to him for seven years, but we have never lived together. That will change when we both retire this July.

**Tell us about some of your hobbies.**

I love to read and knit and have done both from an early age. I know I will need to develop some more hobbies to fill my time after retirement – I'm thinking of needlepoint, but realize that I will need to maintain some physical activities, which I tolerate but frankly don't enjoy. I have a bike and a helmet, so I will probably cycle more.

**What is your favourite place in Canada, and why?**

I don't have one favourite place. I like variety and want to travel and discover more places. I prefer small to big, I appreciate the rural but want to live in an urban, walkable community. When I retire, I will be moving to St. Catharines – which will then become my home and my favourite place.

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

I would give the same advice to anyone – stay curious, stay excited, and stay engaged. There is such a need for our training and talents!

*We gratefully acknowledge the Medical Library Association's permission to adapt the question list from the MLA News Member Spotlight feature.*