

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

The Medical Library Association Guide to Providing Consumer and Patient Health Information. Michele Spatz. Editor: M.D. Lanham. Rowman and Littlefield; 2014. Softcover: 240 p. ISBN 978-1-4422-2570-1. Price: USD\$61.00. Available from: <https://rowman.com>.

I was recently asked to assist in the opening of a consumer health library in our hospital, so I opened this book with much anticipation. My librarian career to date has focused more on the medical health side, so it was my hope that the Medical Library Association's (MLA) new guide would make me more familiar with the consumer health environment and the tasks needed to successfully launch our library. I was not disappointed. I found the book both stimulating and informative, and I feel that every manager of a consumer health library should read it.

The book has 13 chapters that are organized in a logical and sequential manner. The opening chapter, "History of Consumer and Patient Health Librarianship" by Michele Spatz gives a historical perspective, outlining the forces that have created the modern consumer health environment. The rest of the chapters unfold in a sequence that mirrors the planning process for a library opening. The early chapters deal with planning the library's underpinnings: conducting a needs assessment, strategic planning, and budgeting. The next chapters fill out the planning process by addressing technology, staffing, and health reference services. The final chapters address topics that can be tackled just before the library is ready to open: ethical issues, social media, meeting the needs of diverse groups, cultural sensitivity, marketing, and strategic partnerships. Each chapter is written by a consumer health librarian whose real life experiences add character and depth to their contributions. The resources referred to throughout the book are useful and informative. As expected, many are from the MLA website, although chapters also draw on blogs, websites, and other books to provide current and thoughtful resources.

With technology such an important issue in today's library, I found particularly relevant and engaging the chapter written by Michelle Kraft on "Social Media for Health Consumers and Patients", and the chapter "Consumer and Patient Friendly Technology: Today and Tomorrow", co-written by Gabe Rios and Emma O'Hagan. Kraft is known for her blog, "The Krafty Librarian" and is the 2015–2016 MLA President. She uses up-to-date statistics and examples to portray the current social media environment in libraries. I was struck by the statistic from the Mayo Clinic that "as of July 2013, more than 1,500 hospitals in the United States are using at least one social media tool" (p. 138). This would be a persuasive statistic to present to administrators if you were trying to introduce social media into your library. Kraft's example of The American Heart Association's YouTube video demonstrating "hands only" cardiopulmonary resuscitation (p. 139)

made me ponder ways I could use videos to deliver health information. While it is obvious Kraft has a passion for social media she cautions against blindly adopting a presence. She provides a step-by-step plan to ensure the successful implementation of social media within the library (p. 143).

Rios and O'Hagan also provide up-to-date and thought provoking material in their chapter about consumer and patient-friendly technology. Especially valuable is a section on health literacy that includes guides for writing consumer health material and a list of patient-friendly websites that contain reliable health information. They delve deeper into patient technology though by exploring symptom checkers, personal health records, patient portals, mobile health apps, and mHealth (mobile health). Reading this chapter I was able to quickly update myself about a number of new technologies that I had previously known little about.

The MLA guide not only lays out the basic process of getting a consumer health library up and running, it also highlights many creative ways libraries have delivered health information. For example, Linda Stahl's chapter on "Meeting the Needs of Diverse Groups" highlights a program that Planetree Health Resource Centre developed with the local school district. After a tour of the Consumer Health Library students are taught the basics of finding and evaluating health information. The lessons are reinforced with a research essay that students complete on a health topic of interest to their age group (p. 158). This partnership not only teaches health literacy to students, but it also promotes the library through engagement with the community.

Although I found the book a comprehensive resource, there were some areas I thought were neglected. Planning a consumer health library can be an isolating experience. As I worked on ours, I would often wonder what services other libraries offered or how they addressed a certain problem. In addition, I wanted to know practical things such as what is the average budget for a consumer health library, the average number of people they employ, or the number of volunteers they use. Providing a snapshot of the current day consumer health library would have let me know what my peers were doing, and provided me with a way to compare my library with theirs.

I work in the Toronto area, where shrinking hospital budgets mean that consumer health libraries rely, at least to some extent, on volunteers. I don't believe this is a phenomenon restricted to Toronto either. In a recent MLA survey, 51.1% of consumer health librarians reported that institutional cutbacks had affected their budgets [1]. Despite this, volunteers are only briefly mentioned throughout the staffing chapter. Given the current economic climate I believe that volunteers are an important resource and deserve a more substantial section in the staffing chapter.

Reading the MLA guide made me wish that I had been involved earlier in the planning process of our library. However, there is still much work to be done, and the book

has already proved useful as I identify the ways we want to market and expand the services the library provides. *The Medical Library Association Guide to Providing Consumer and Patient Health Information* is a comprehensive resource that should be on every consumer health librarian's bookshelf.

Reference

1. Forsberg N. Informal Consumer Health Librarian Salary Survey [Internet]. Medical Library Association, 2013 October 18 [cited 2015 Aug 2015]. Available from: <http://caphis.mlanet.org/chis/salary.html>.

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