

# Vital Pathways for Hospital Librarians: Addressing the Hospital's Information and Training Needs



## Executive Summary

[www.mlanet.org/resources/vital/](http://www.mlanet.org/resources/vital/)

# Introduction

The rapid changes in health care have presented the medical community with a number of challenges. Some national organizations, such as the Joint Commission, the American College of Healthcare Executives, the American Medical Association, and the National Priorities Partnership, have recommended actions to address these challenges, including training for the healthcare workforce, adoption of new technologies, focusing on patient-centered care, and changes in hospital design.

The roles of hospital librarians have evolved to meet the needs of this changing environment and to help hospitals keep their competitive edge. Librarians provide support for the use of quality improvement tools to increase efficiency and reduce costs; they support digital technology for patient-centered hospital care and help to extend that care beyond the hospital walls; they assist with the widespread adoption of health information technology; and they help to address barriers to patient and family engagement, such as low health literacy and cultural preferences. Almost 95% of the magnet hospitals recognized by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program® are served by libraries and librarians.

The intent of the Medical Library Association's (MLA) Vital Pathways for Hospital Librarians whitepaper ([http://www.mlanet.org/pdf/resources/wells\\_myths\\_truths\\_0610.pdf](http://www.mlanet.org/pdf/resources/wells_myths_truths_0610.pdf)) is to serve as a catalyst for dialogue between hospital librarians and administrators about the contributions that the hospital librarian can make in assisting the hospital in addressing these challenges. The Vital Pathways whitepaper describes the hospital librarian's roles and contributions by building upon a 2002 study commissioned by MLA on the contributions of library and information services (LIS) to hospitals and academic health centers. The study identified five mission-level concepts and associated goals for hospitals and the hospital librarian's contributions to these missions using information obtained from hospital administrators and LIS directors through a balanced scorecard approach [1].

## Hospital Mission-Critical Goals

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- **Clinical care:** provide excellent clinical care and promote clinical learning.
- **Management of operations:** promote sound management decisions, increase profitability, meet accreditation standards, reduce corporate risk, provide an organizational learning environment, and promote staff satisfaction and institutional attractiveness.
- **Education:** provide excellent educational programs and resources and services necessary for teaching and learning.
- **Innovation and research:** adopt innovative technologies and practices and foster research.
- **Customer service:** improve lives of patients and families and lives of community members.

## Roles of Hospital Librarians

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### 🔗 The Hospital Librarian and Clinical Care

#### **Key role: Provide evidence-based resources by:**

- developing systems to acquire, organize, and disseminate essential clinical information resources;
- finding the best evidence to support clinical decision-making and the development of policies, guidelines, and procedures related to clinical care;
- designing and providing patient education materials to reinforce the verbal explanations and instructions that are part of the patient care process; and
- participating in patient rounds and morning report, locating studies that result in changes in patient care and often have a positive impact on patient length of stay.

#### **Key outcome: Excellent clinical care and better patient outcomes.**

### 🔗 The Hospital Librarian and the Management of Operations

#### **Key role: Support the efficiency and effectiveness of hospital operations by:**

- providing background information for planning and quality improvement teams, increasing profitability by minimizing the amount of time and money health care professionals spend finding relevant diagnostic and treatment information;

- improving timely decision-making by pre-packaging information and arranging information-alerting services for key risk management groups such as patient safety and infection control committees;
- reducing corporate risk by providing evidence-based information regarding best practices, government regulations and accreditation standards, and adherence to corporate compliance and copyright compliance;
- assisting with integration of evidence-based resources into electronic medical record systems;
- using expert information organization and retrieval skills to reduce staff frustration and enhance the overall job satisfaction of hospital and health professionals throughout the institution; and
- managing electronic resources, selecting the best databases, negotiating licensing agreements, and maintaining serials management systems.

**Key outcome: Increased profitability, reduction of corporate risk, time savings, and increased job satisfaction for hospital and health professionals.**

### ↻ The Hospital Librarian and Education

**Key role: Support both employees and staff in meeting each group's continuing education and just-in-time instruction needs by:**

- teaching others and acting as an expert consultant on searching the knowledge-based literature and finding and integrating the best evidence for clinical decision-making;
- providing access to onsite and Internet-based electronic health learning resources and creating systems for managing learning objects and curriculum resources;
- partnering with hospital educators to develop and manage web-based and other learning content;
- managing computer training facilities;
- Identifying, acquiring, and promoting materials to support licensing, certification, and recertification examinations; and
- developing curricula and providing instruction for staff competencies in evidence-based information retrieval and cultural and health information literacy.

**Key outcome: Better trained and prepared hospital and health professionals.**

### ↻ The Hospital Librarian and Innovation and Research

**Key role: Support the information needs of hospital-based researchers and clinicians and administrators, bringing "bench to bedside" by:**

- promoting and enhancing the practice of evidence-based health care (EBHC) in the hospital;
- finding and disseminating comparative and benchmarking data to support management decision-making and quality improvement efforts;
- providing alerting services and updates on new technologies and practices to speed dissemination of information about hospital innovations; and
- providing information support for research proposal development and preventing duplication of research efforts.

**Key outcome: Development of new knowledge and transfer of new knowledge into practice for clinical and non-clinical staff.**

### ↻ The Hospital Librarian and Customer Service

**Key role: Support positive patient health outcomes and provide and market information services directly to patients, their families, and the community by:**

- selecting, personalizing, and filtering quality information for patients and their families at appropriate health literacy levels;
- providing classes in health literacy and cultural literacy competencies to hospital medical staff;
- teaching classes to the community on how to find the most credible and reliable health information;
- supporting disaster preparedness and emergency response programs within the hospital and the community; and
- helping to remove barriers that deny patients' access to quality health information and providing services that enable patients to be partners in making decisions that will affect their own health outcomes.

**Key outcome: Increased patient and family satisfaction with the hospital and its services.**

## The Librarian: The Hospital's Competitive Edge

From saving hospitals thousands of dollars per year to saving patients' lives, hospital librarians help fulfill many mission-critical roles in today's hospital. These roles include those of expert searcher, educator, community outreach provider, promoter of the practice of evidence-based medicine, disseminator of best medical practices and best business practice information, effective user of information technology, webmaster, patient safety information provider, and supporter of innovation and research.

Hospital librarians provide the right information at the right time to enhance medical staff effectiveness, optimize patient care, and improve patient outcomes. They save clinicians time, thereby saving the institution money. They provide an excellent return on investment for the hospital, playing a vital role on the health care team from a patient's diagnosis to recovery. Their services are also a valuable employee and community benefit, building staff satisfaction with their jobs and patient and family satisfaction with the health care they receive.



1. Abels EG, Codgill KW. The contributions of library and information services to hospitals and academic health sciences centers: a preliminary taxonomy. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2002 Jul;90(3):276-84

The complete white paper will appear in the October 2009 issue of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* and will be accessible through MLANET.