



MLA Podcast 001 – Sally Gore Interviews Elizabeth Suelzer

Sally Gore 0:08

Welcome everyone to Press, Play, Connect, the Medical Library Association's podcast to connect you to some of our members, to let you know interesting things that they're up to, the cool kind of things that they do in their work, some of their interesting research - just a new way for us to share our wealth of knowledge and expertise and just good naturedness in the membership with one another and help everybody to see what we do as medical librarians. Thanks for tuning in. I want to say this is the very first episode and I'm really excited about it. My name is Sally Gore and along with Emily Hurst, we are going to coproduce these things and have them play through MLACONnect over the next however long it goes, and however successful that we find it to be.

I work myself at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts. I manage the Department of Research and Scholarly Communication Services and I serve on the board of the Medical Library Association as a member. And I'm just delighted to be doing this and delighted to welcome our very first guest, Elizabeth Selzer. And Liz is going to introduce herself.

Tell us a little bit, Liz about what you do, how long you've been at this job and medical libraries in general. And thanks again for being our very first person.

Elizabeth Suelzer 1:44

It's an honor to be on your podcast and thank you for having me as your very first person. I am the User Education and Reference Librarian at the Medical College of Wisconsin libraries in Milwaukee. Go Pack, go! We just want to very important football game, so we're very excited here.

Sally Gore
Excellent.

Elizabeth Suelzer

I've been working at the Medical College Libraries for around nine years, and I've been in my education position for five of those years. We're an academic medical center, a private, four-year college and then four-year medical school, and we also support for your hospital and children's Wisconsin.

Sally Gore
Lots of hats.

Elizabeth Suelzer
Pardon?

Sally Gore
You wear lots of hats.

Elizabeth Suelzer 2:27

Lots of hats. In my role, I teach evidence-based medicine and literature searching. I also manage our website and web presence, and I help with research and scholarly communications topics, among other things.

Sally Gore 2:44

Wonderful, wonderful. So, I asked you to be a guest on our podcast because back in December, you had an article published in MLAConnect that sort of, more, it highlighted a full article that you had published in JAMA Network Open back in November. And it's really an interesting piece that you did. And I thought it would be a great kickoff to our series. So, the article on MLAConnect was, [*A Librarian Led Research Shows the Need to Reference Retraction Status and Articles*](#), and this is based on some research that you did with some colleagues. And that ultimately, got published in an article in JAMA Network Open called Assessment of Citations of the Retracted Article by Wakefield and all, [*With Fraudulent Claims of An Association Between Vaccination and Autism*](#).

That's a mouthful. An excellent article and for those listening, we'll have links to these to both of these so you can go back and and double check it or read them and reference them as we're having our discussion. But Liz, what was the spark for this research study that you did?

Elizabeth Suelzer 3:58

Sure. There were a couple of sparks. So one of them, the initial idea for this, came from an article that we passed around the library. I'm sorry. One of the initial sparks for this article came from for this research project came from an article that I had come across the colleague has sent it to me. It's called the [*1980 Letter on the Risk of Opioid Addiction*](#).

So, researchers looked at a very highly cited article with a very alluring headline. But the meat of the article wasn't, there wasn't a lot of substance. The entire article, the alluring headline, was that something along the lines of opioids aren't actually addictive. But when you look at the entire article, you read that the patient population in the group was very controlled, as the article is almost five sentences and the one of the coauthors was from a pharmaceutical company, and searchers made an amazing graph that showed over time whether researchers decided to study agreed or disagreed with the findings when they cited it. And it was kind of very interesting to see the changes in how people viewed the article. As opioids became very popular. And then people started taking another look at them.

So, this study was super interesting and it actually got it the context of the citation. So that was just in my mind for quite a while. And then in 2017, MLA sent out an announcement about the Research Training Institute, asking, "Are you a library is interested in doing research?" And I said, "Yes." I didn't have a lot of experience during research, but it seemed like something I'd want to do. My institution produces a lot of research and I work and help people in their research projects, but I've never done one of my own. So when I went to look at the application for this, and I had to fill out a protocol for the research project, I'd like to do the article by Leung et al was at the back of my - or at the forefront - of my mind and help me kind of put together the proposal. So it was really based on the methodology used here, and then taking it forward.

Sally Gore 6:13

Yes, full disclosure, I've been on the instructor for the Research Training Institute since the beginning, but that's not why - I'm not bragging on the institute or anything - but very happy that you took part in it and did this. So, tell us tell us what you did then in this study. And in you know, in your little elevator speech for what you did for the study.

Elizabeth Suelzer 6:40

When I was trying to decide which type of article that I wanted to do the citation analysis on, we were in the middle of many measles outbreaks in the United States and the anti Vax movement very loud on social media. So, it made sense to take a look at the Wakefield articles in 1998, articles that claim to

show links between the MMR vaccine and autism. When I looked at this article, it's highly cited. It's been cited over, probably by now over 1200 times in Web of Science. And I was really interested to figure out people who were citing this in scholarly literature, what were their thoughts? And what was the context of the citation? Were they agreeing with findings were they using it as background information and for their papers? Or were they contradicting or negating the results? And this article, the Wakefield article underwent two separate retractions. And there was a partial retraction in 2004 by most of the authors who wanted to take a step back from the claims that the measles vaccine might cause autism. And then there was a full retraction by them. By the Lancet in 2010. This was a unique article.

Sally Gore 7:53

But is that really common to have a partial retraction? I was curious when I was reading the article.

Elizabeth Suelzer 8:00

It was pretty uncommon. It hasn't happened many times before. We could find. I wasn't able to identify any other instance of this that probably has happened in the past, but it's pretty uncommon.

Sally Gore

Yeah, yeah.

Elizabeth Suelzer

And we were wondering, you know, the article was highly cited throughout since the time it was published, you know, continued to receive a lot of citations. And we were wondering after the 2004, retraction, and after the 2010, retraction, were the authors who were citing it, mentioning that it was retracted. So we had to really aim. We wanted to see the context of the citations and then whether or not the retractions were actually mentioned. We also set out to look to see which disciplines were citing this and how they cited the retraction and how they the context.

We didn't get a lot of good data from that, so we left that part of the article and what we found was from the beginning as soon as I or authors started citing this article, they were negating the findings that was pretty consistent across the entire time period. Authors initially cited the fact that this was the first time these results have been seen and they weren't able to prove that there was any connection between MMR and autism. No epidemiological studies could support that. They were also looking at how many patients were involved in how they were chosen, and there were some flaws in the study. And then later on, people were looking at, you know, the retracted status of the article and kind of commenting on that piece for the mediational citations. And as far as their retractions go, although authors use really strong words to describe the article, like flawed and bad and other words like that, just describe how poorly done the study was. Many authors weren't citing the retracted status of the article, which made us question why they left that piece of information out saying a study is flawed is one thing but then saying it was actually the editors took steps to retract it as another level step.

Sally Gore 10:20

Yeah. One of the things that I found really interesting and reading it, reading the article in the original article, not the article in MLAConnect, but the original article itself was well, one you just point out the thing that we try to tell our authors or and just the general public a lot in terms of scholarly communications that is that you know, impact and, and facts don't necessarily, you know, they're not, they don't go one to one like in this article is a great example of that, that it's been cited over and over and over again. But it's not factual in ways and it is flawed. As you said, that's the word that a lot of researchers use. And so I think that's just a really important thing to hammer home a lot when we talk about metrics and just doing those sorts of tracking the impact of research, that impact can be positive and impact can be negative, and it can be just not really very clear just the numbers themselves.

So, we talk about that a lot. I know with our faculty members and researchers when we were doing it, but I think your case also makes a great point for letting that just showing how it ripples through the public as well and the importance of that.

The other thing I thought that was really interesting is you talk about the lack of standards among publishers or just a lack of common practice between publishers and editors and bibliographic databases in terms of how they tag these articles, or how they use it and like, what are the, you know, you stated some of the problems you think with that, could you articulate that a little bit for us or share a little more?

Elizabeth Suelzer

We were wondering why the retracted status wasn't listed on publications and when we want to look at where authors can be pulling the articles from and we realized some pretty big problems right off the bat. We go into PubMed and you look at the retracted article, there's a big red banner across the top and that's great. It does show you that it's retracted. It's pretty clear. But when you download that citation into a Reference Manager, the retracted publication type all that disappears. So, it's no longer there, so if you're relying on something like EndNote to accurately cite your citations or to create citations for a document, that retracted status just disappears and authors might be relying too much on it without realizing that that information was gone.

And we also looked at citation styles. So, the AMA style gives some recommendations on how to cite retracted articles. But it's a little clunky on fitting all that information into the citation. And the APA style, before this most recent edition, had no information on how to cite or retracted article, which is unfortunate. And without that guidance authors, you know, probably aren't aware that, you know, they should be adding extra information.

Sally Gore 13:29

Exactly, exactly. So, what do you think can be what would be some of your suggestions to improve this situation?

Elizabeth Suelzer 13:36

So we've seen data, the database Web of Science, which is run by Clarivate Analytics, does a lot of processing to a retracted article. They go back in and use the item record and they actually put the word retracted but then the title was retracted colon and then the rest of the title, so that when you download that information, you're not going to lose that piece. So they are like, they do a really great job with that. I haven't seen other databases who do that amount of re-indexing. So that's one thing.

Elizabeth Suelzer 14:06

Also, what we've noticed is you can download an article today and then the article might be retracted in a year or two. And it's hard to tell. You know, when you go back to a personal library, what happened with that retraction? Or "What happened?" Or "When did that article in fact, get retracted?" The citation software, Zotero, has this really cool built in feature that they just added within the past few months, where if you have a citation in your library that's been retracted. Zotero calls out for retraction watch periodically and you get a big message when you open up Zotero saying an article in your library has been retracted. Zotero is an open source, citation manager that works really well. And having those extra feature is something that makes me apt to use it more. I already liked it. I like it even more now.

Sally Gore 15:06

Yes, I was gonna ask, you know, one of the things I was thinking, what are some of the resources that you would suggest? And there too, right? There's [Zotero](#) and then [Retraction Watch](#) that you mentioned. Are there other things that you would suggest to other librarians or just with things that you think we could suggest to our, our patron groups?

Elizabeth Suelzer

I think that other our librarians should advocate for their services in creating bibliographies and reference lists. And I know it is a complicated job to do a little bit tedious at times, but I think we add a lot of value when we can do these double checking of the citations. And if there's a way that we can automate that a little more or come up with ways to make a reference list and automatically check it against something I think that would be a good innovation.

Sally Gore 15:59

Yep. Yes. I know that when we when I emailed you to ask if you would be a part of, of this conversation that you said how timely it was because just, you know, we're a few weeks into the new year. And we've already seen a pretty big news story about a retracted article. We had the Nobel Laureate, Francis Arnold, who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 2018. Just at the turn of this year, she had to announce a retraction of an article and, in all fairness, it's not the article that she won the Nobel Prize award for - wasn't that but other research in it, you know - and she came forward and honestly, you know, said the mistake. But it certainly goes to show people make mistakes, purposefully or not. You know, it's science. And so a whole part of reproducibility of research and retractions and all those sorts of things are really important and things that we follow along in our profession and can certainly help other health researchers and authors and everyone in terms of following best practices in that regard. Yeah, definitely.

Elizabeth Suelzer

Something with that article that was retracted. It was published in 2018. And then retracted in 2020. When I looked in a couple of databases to see how retraction was cited.

Sally Gore

Yes.

Elizabeth Suelzer

The banner across the page, the journals websites got a link to the retracted status, but Scopus had nothing listed. There are differences in databases. I don't know what the time period is for how often databases get updates from these types of things. But, you know, that's a problem. And then the article was published in 2018. I'm sure it's sitting on a number of hard drives all over the world.

Sally Gore

Exactly.

Elizabeth Suelzer

People know that this, you know, when they open it up today, they may not know that those data can't necessarily be relied upon.

Sally Gore

Exactly. So, it's an issue. It's a big issue. And I think your study was a really good one and a great, just interesting, in the topic in itself. And I love how you just say, you read this one article it brought up this topic, and maybe I want to go do some research in this, which we encourage one another professionally to do it and to get our toes wet, so to speak and doing that. And so you did the Research Training Institute. Any thoughts on that whole experience for other librarians who might be considering signing on?

Elizabeth Suelzer 18:40

Yeah, I thought it was a really, really great experience. I was a librarian who was interested in doing research, but I just I like to have any kind of hold my hand through my first time doing anything and have a mentor to somebody to kind of walk me through the process. And this that's exactly what happened in RTI. I got some really good training, I was assigned to a mentor and there's a group of librarians that I can send an email out to, to get questions and opinions on, so I've got a community that I can kind of call upon and, and also this being part of the RTI, the year long fellowship process. I

was kind of, how do I say this, there were built in timelines in place or built in deadlines in place, which helps me stay focused through this. I was held to some accountability. Yeah, it was very good for me for getting my first project done.

Sally Gore 19:38

Yeah, I think for any of us who, unless you are in some luxurious position and you can buy some time out to do research, which is not how most of us work, it's really nice to have something in place to help us stay on track and, and do those sorts of things. So, for those folks listening, the RTI is accepting applications. Now you can go on the MLA website and get more information about that. There's lots of info there, you can see some of the other projects that have been done. And certainly you can go read Liz's paper and you'll be impressed and you'll think, "I want to do that. I want to do a paper. This work this impressive, and important, and important work to do." Excellent.

So I just want to wrap up our first episode here with the question that Emily and I came up with and we want to ask this to all of our guests, because we're one thing we hope to do with this podcast is for the public outside of MLA outside of our membership to kind of have a better understanding of what medical librarians do. So, here's your question. We'll ask everyone. What's something that you do in your work as medical librarian that always surprises people when you tell them?

Elizabeth Suelzer 21:03

So, one of the hats I wear and my position is I'm a clinical medical librarian. And I have tumor boards which is a multidisciplinary board where healthcare providers meet, talk about patient care, and they make decisions. And some of the patients we work with have such rare tumors. So, there's not a lot of information out there on the topic. And with my expert searching skills, I'm able to kind of really dive into the literature and do some expert searches to come up with evidence to hopefully help them make their decision. Finding that type of information is challenging, and the information that I provide them has helped determine kind of the course of healthcare according to the evidence. So, it's something that's really meaningful to me to be able to provide and it is surprising when people find out a librarian sits at the table as well, but you do have a unique skill set.

Sally Gore 21:57

Yes, absolutely. Terrific. Well, thank you again, Liz. Any last thoughts you want to share as your wrap up our thing?

Elizabeth Suelzer 22:09

Um, well, I think one last thought I'd like to share about this is that the Wakefield article has been a really infamously retracted article and people who hear of it probably understand that at some point it was retracted. But there's all sorts of other retracted articles in the literature where if you're part of that specific field, you may be aware of its retracted status. But for outsiders who are reading the literature, they may not be so if they're missing the retracted piece, either in the publication or somewhere in it's unfortunate and you're not providing the best information out there. So be sure to mention retractions if you're citing or retracted article.

Sally Gore 22:51

Excellent. Good advice. Thank you so much, Liz, and great to chat with you today. Thanks again for being on the podcast for those listening. I hope you'll tune in for this series as we go along. If you've got an idea and you're really you want to be interviewed or you want to share something, hey, we're open for that as well. There's contact information, in MLACONnect to help with that. Thanks again, Liz. Thanks again for everyone for listening. Thanks to the Medical Library Association for helping us put this out. Have a great day.