

# COMPETENCIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

The Educational Policy Statement of the Medical Library Association



*We must educate for the problems of a generation hence, not for the problems of today ... librarians must be imbued with the psychological ability to handle change and to live with ambiguity. Without this they will be performing tomorrow's tasks with yesterday's concepts.*

—Estelle Brodman, 1979 [1]

## Final Report

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# INTRODUCTION

In 1991 when the Medical Library Association (MLA) created *Platform for Change*, its first educational policy statement, libraries and information practice were entering a new era of rapid change and turbulence. Exponential growth in biomedical knowledge, new information technologies, and upheaval in the health care environment were all driving transformation in the work and setting of information professionals. The American Library Association (ALA) had requested educational policy statements from all specialty branches of the profession. In addition, the Council on Library Resources [1] urged librarians to describe the future of the profession, and MLA responded by conducting a national study that established a clear picture of the knowledge and skills its members would require to thrive in a time of great challenge.

Now, fifteen years after first defining the competencies its members would need to pursue, the association has revisited its policy statement. Besides updating the description of essential areas of knowledge and skills, this document contains revised recommendations for major stakeholders. In keeping with the future-oriented approach of *Platform for Change*, the revised policy statement breaks new ground by describing its relationship to the whole of MLA's professional development programs and services. It sets forth the context in which information professionals work and the formal and informal expertise required by the health care environment. It interrelates to the association's

working bodies, educational offerings, career planning and program, and other fundamentals of the unique niche of professional information practice focused on the health sciences. Under the general framework of MLA's Center for Research and Education (CORE), the research and education policy statements provide a foundation and conceptual base from which many association programs flow.

As was true for the earlier version, *Platform for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success* speaks to many audiences, including but not limited to MLA members, providers and consumers of educational programs, organizations and individuals interested in health care issues, and leaders at all levels. It reinforces the requisite knowledgebase and skills, the personal attributes, and the linkage among association programs that will ensure the continued achievement of excellence by health information specialists and the profession as a whole. Throughout the document the reader will generally find the terms "health information professional" and "health sciences librarian" used to encompass work that takes places in a broad spectrum of settings and across a range of biosciences and health-related disciplines.

## Reference

1. Council on Library Resources. Information studies: a new CLR professional education program. Annual report of Council on Library Resources. Washington, DC: The Council, 1989.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, the management of information and knowledge in the health care environment is a national priority with increasing attention paid to evidence-based health care, patient safety and privacy, health literacy, and creation of electronic patient records. Technology has become central to the operation of every library.

The advancing biosciences research enterprise makes it necessary for professionals fulfilling health information roles to manage increasingly complex knowledgebases and data sets. These professionals may have a variety of titles including health information professional, health information specialist, informationist, medical librarian, informatician, or health sciences librarian. This policy statement refers to these professionals as health sciences librarians or health information professionals.

# A CHALLENGING WORK SETTING

MLA believes that lifelong learning must be a cornerstone of every individual's professional development plan to achieve success in the health sciences environment and that individuals must assume greater personal responsibility for defining their ongoing learning goals, increasing their competencies, and improving their professional performance. Consequently, the association has been offering professional continuing education courses for almost fifty years and has been involved in professional development programs and services for much longer [3].

Since this policy's precursor, "*Platform for Change: The Educational Policy Statement of the Medical Library Association*," the world of health information and health sciences librarianship has changed dramatically. The work of health sciences librarians takes place in an increasingly broader spectrum of settings and across a broad range of biosciences and health-related disciplines. Health sciences librarians function in ways shaped by a number of significant factors including: changing elements and structure of medical knowledge; rapid introduction of new technologies and techniques for information processing and dissemination; altered patterns of institutional organization, management, and governance; and the drive to maintain excellence. Health

sciences librarianship stands apart in ensuring that knowledge about advances in the science and technology of health care research and practice is readily accessible to health care professionals, educators, students, researchers, and the public.

Following are the seven professional competency areas needed by health sciences librarians today along with recommendations for actions that individuals and professional organizations, health sciences librarians, MLA, employers, graduate programs in library and information science, and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) can take to promote professional development and lifelong learning. In some competency areas, such as technology and systems management, new knowledge and skills have been added, while in others, specific knowledge and skills have been broadened to include, for example, diversity issues. Recommendations from the previous policy statement that were either acted upon or that are no longer relevant have been eliminated in this edition. Individuals cannot achieve mastery of all knowledge and every desirable skill in each competency area, but will emphasize different areas at different points in their careers and in different institutional settings.



## Professional Competencies for Health Sciences Librarians



### 1. Understand the health sciences and health care environment and the policies, issues, and trends that impact that environment including:

- current management and business practices
- the parent organization's (academic medical center, hospital, government, corporate, etc.) major policy and program sources
- the health sciences professions
- the clinical care, research, medical education, cultural, ethical, economic, and legal issues and environments
- various health and health-related organizations



### 2. Know and understand the application of leadership, finance, communication, and management theory and techniques including:

- understanding the institution's mission and planning processes and the role of the library in the institution
- forging and maintaining alliances with universities, public libraries, public health services, community-based organizations, and others to meet users' information needs
- human resources management including recruitment, retention, staff development, and mentoring
- facilities planning and space allocation
- budgeting, cost analyses, and fund-raising
- public relations, marketing, and advertising
- library programs and services administration



### 3. Understand the principles and practices related to providing information services to meet users' needs including:

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- the information needs of health practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, students, patients, consumers, and the general public
- the institution's information policies
- methods of information delivery and access including consideration of the specific information needs of diverse populations
- information services management



### 4. Have the ability to manage health information resources in a broad range of formats including:

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- selection, acquisitions, and control of resources including the licensing of resources
- scholarly publishing, copyright, licensing, privacy, and intellectual property issues
- conservation, preservation, and archiving of materials in all formats
- cataloging, classification, abstracting, and thesaurus construction and knowledge representation
- national and international standards and conventions
- trends in information formatting, production, packaging, and dissemination



### 5. Understand and use technology and systems to manage all forms of information including:

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- basic principles of automated systems, data standards, and systems analysis techniques including design and evaluation
- acquisition, use, and evaluation of information technologies
- integration of systems and technologies
- technological solutions for permanent access to electronic information
- applications in emerging areas of biomedicine computational biology and health information, including electronic health care systems and records
- communications and information infrastructure including the Internet and Web



### 6. Understand curricular design and instruction and have the ability to teach ways to access, organize, and use information including:

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- adult learning theory and cognitive psychology
- educational needs assessment, analysis, and evaluation
- instructional methodologies, technologies, and systems design
- management of education services



### 7. Understand scientific research methods and have the ability to critically examine and filter research literature from many related disciplines including:

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- using quantitative and qualitative methodologies and techniques and their interpretation
- locating, organizing, and critically evaluating the research literature
- using principles of evidence-based practice to support decision making
- conducting research and reporting and disseminating research findings either individually or in interdisciplinary research teams

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

## A. Individuals and professional organizations

1. develop strategies to recruit a diverse and talented cadre of information professionals
2. provide new opportunities in the continuum of learning
3. continue educating the educators

## B. Health sciences librarians

1. aggressively seek lifelong education and professional development opportunities from a variety of sources and design and implement a plan for continuing professional development
2. exercise leadership in and contribute to the professional development of the field
3. uphold and advocate for the values of the profession and apply them to changing information environments

## C. The Medical Library Association

1. sets the standards for professional competency to assist employers in recruiting and retaining individuals who will be successful in the changing arena of health sciences librarianship
2. continues its leadership role in creating a vital and responsive professional development program and a dynamic set of coordinated education opportunities
3. collaborates with all participants in the educational arena
4. promotes adoption or development of staff development programs for information professionals by employers
5. maintains its formal liaison with graduate schools of library and information science education
6. designs and implements a research agenda that advances the professional knowledgebase

## D. Employers of health sciences librarians

1. recruit competent and promising individuals and involve them in meeting the information needs of the institution
2. place a high priority on staff development

## E. Library and information science educators

1. lay a broad foundation that stresses theory over application, places librarianship in context with other related disciplines, fosters professional values, and prepares students to design their own learning program throughout the length of their careers
2. support students who desire to work in a health sciences setting by offering flexible options for students to gain necessary skill sets
3. provide a range of programs and opportunities that meet needs throughout a professional career, rather than focus solely on the master's degree
4. provide the impetus and forum for continued education of the educators

## F. The National Library of Medicine

1. continues to identify future directions and priorities for its activities to support the educational needs of health sciences librarians
2. provides additional training opportunities for health sciences librarians to acquire new knowledge and skills, such as through identifying and funding centers of excellence for advanced training in health information at strategic points across the country

## References

2. Brodman E. Keynote address: pragmatism and intellection in medical library education. In: Proceedings of Allerton Invitational Conference on Education for Health Sciences Librarianship. Monticello, IL; 2–4 Apr 1979. Chicago, IL: Medical Library Association, 1979:viii.
3. Roper FW. The Medical Library Association's professional development program: a look back at the way ahead. *J Med Libr Assoc* 2006 Jan;94(1):8–18.

# HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANSHIP IN CONTEXT

The health sciences environment continues to be inundated by ever-expanding and mutating information sources, products, and services. Unrelenting change buffets libraries and their clients on multiple fronts. Biomedical knowledge expands exponentially each year, while publishers and other vendors reach farther back in time to digitize print publications. Technology has become central to the operation of every library, even as mobile computing and work styles continue to evolve and drive swift obsolescence in computer hardware and software. New opportunities for technology applications abound, enhancing the speed of communication and knowledge transfer.

Libraries and librarians remain in a singular position to provide information and knowledge management solutions that integrate and make optimal use of resources and people. Health sciences librarianship stands apart by striving to ensure that knowledge about advances in the science and technology of health care research and practice are readily accessible to health care professionals, educators, students, researchers, and the public. As modern society demands the assurance of decisions based on scientific data and sound knowledge management principles, the information professional plays an essential role.

A health information professional draws heavily on the general field of librarianship. Indeed, the knowledge and skills required by a medical librarian bear many similarities to those delineated by the Special Libraries Association [4] and other branches of the profession. Yet a librarian in the intellectually and technologically sophisticated context of health care also requires expertise significantly different from those of colleagues in other library services. In addition, MLA has issued a code of professional ethics to inform the work its members perform [5], and that code must be upheld in applying the knowledge and skills described in this document.

The health sciences information professional holds a pivotal role in the handling of biomedical information, combining the ability to use the knowledgebases of the health sciences and the technical expertise of librarianship with clearheaded problem-solving, analytical competence, and well-honed interpersonal and organizational skills. Librarians assume responsibility, transcending that of the library itself, for assessing the information needs of a diverse array of health services workers and the general public while also managing health information resources.

The health information professional not only provides specific support to the institution by using new technolo-

gies to organize, synthesize, and filter information for scholarly, clinical, and institutional decision making, but also plays a critical role in the investigation and study of information storage, organization, use, and application in education, patient care, and generation of new knowledge. In accomplishing these responsibilities, the health information professional must forge alliances throughout the institution, eliciting strong support for the library's mission and performing outreach while collaborating to define and solve information problems. Librarians serve as full partners to teaching and research colleagues and advise national policies. Because an individual's personal characteristics greatly influence success, they are described in the next section of this document.

Today, the management of information and knowledge in the health care environment is a national priority with increasing attention to evidence-based care and digital access to personal datasets and electronic patient records. Society is focusing new attention and resources that address consumer health, public health, and health disparities across diverse populations. Similarly, the advancing biosciences research enterprise compels management of complex knowledgebases and data sets. In fulfilling roles that support health care and biomedical research, librarians must ensure ongoing review and revision of the educational process that prepares new information professionals and continually enhances the skills and knowledge of current practitioners. MLA's educational policy statement serves as the foundation for many of the association's activities and services:

- It defines the necessary competencies for success in this specialized field.
- It forms the basis for selection of continuing education programs to be made available to the profession.
- It provides the elemental framework for the Academy of Health Information Professionals.
- It serves as a major foundation of the association's CORE.

## References

4. Special Libraries Association. Competencies for information professionals of the 21st century. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: The Association, Jun 2003.
5. Medical Library Association. Code of ethics for health sciences librarianship. [Web document]. Chicago, IL: The Association. [rev. 25 October 2000; cited 19 Jan 2007]. <<http://www.mlanet.org/about/ethics.html>>.

# CONTINUUM OF LEARNING

## Health information professionals function in ways shaped by a number of significant factors:

- changing elements and structure of medical knowledge
- rapid introduction of new technologies and techniques for information processing and dissemination
- altered patterns of institutional organization, management, and governance
- the drive to maintain excellence

Education in this area is uniquely challenging both because the gap it attempts to bridge is inherently unstable and defies efforts to span its expanse and because it cannot be limited to any one phase of a professional's life. Furthermore, responsibility for its effective application in practice belongs to the individual rather than to any institutional provider of educational programs and services.

Because education cannot be limited to any one phase of an individual's career, a larger frame of reference—a *continuum of learning*—is needed to influence professional performance in the twenty-first century. *Structured education* becomes only one of the many options open to the professional. It must be combined with *continuing education* and continuing learning as conditions of professional practice. In graduate and continuing education, professionals are guided by others toward explicit sets of closely related learning goals.

*Lifelong learning*, however, does not rely on the structured interventions that convey, refresh, and update baseline knowledge or provide new knowledge, skills, and techniques. In continuing learning, professionals assume greater responsibility for directing themselves, usually informally, and often pursue several unrelated learning strategies simultaneously to increase competence and improve professional performance. Such learning often takes place through an active network of individuals mentoring one another in the context of their work and often through the very activity of that work.

In the continuum of learning, the single most important variable is the individual professional: his or her motivation, prior experience, sense of what is required by changing circumstances or conditions of employment, and quality of judgment in choosing learning experiences. The continuum moves from the didactic to the self-directed,

from a narrow band of specialized knowledge and skill to a broader environment of cognitive and social complexity. Learning moves along a continuum from stable and consistent conditions to those that confront learners with problems that change and are less structured but are important and are close to actual work situations.

All who hold a stake in the professional performance of health sciences librarians play significant roles in the continuum of learning. As providers of educational programs and services use the continuum as a model for professional learning, new streams of programs may emerge, combining more complex, self-directed strategies with ongoing updating and refresher activities. Answers to questions of quality, accessibility, and significance are tailored to individuals and groups with shared needs, goals, and arenas of practice. The roles of graduate schools, professional societies, commercial vendors of programs, and others are clarified. For employers, discovering, advancing, and tending *learning relationships* within and outside the organization are key tasks. For professionals, learning plotted on the continuum should become intentional, undertaken with personal, professional, and institutional outcomes in view and mixing self-managed learning experiences with provider- or employer-directed programs.

Ongoing collaboration in developing a common learning and development agenda is incumbent upon universities, graduate colleges of library and information studies, MLA and other professional societies, commercial vendors and publishers, employers, and consumer-professionals. Competence assessment, professional mentoring, and recognition of excellence in performance can serve the profession best through a combined effort. Through its comprehensive approach to education and learning in health sciences librarianship, MLA endorses fundamental career planning, knowledge and skills development, and collaboration.

# PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESS

**H**ealth information professionals function in a demanding environment with highly educated and skilled health care colleagues. Beyond mastering core information knowledge and competencies, the librarian will achieve optimal success when formal education is complemented by other skills and an array of personal characteristics and traits. This blend of skills allows information professionals to apply their formal education, manage operations, collaborate with a wide range of individuals, and exercise leadership in innovation and service excellence.

Because of the tremendous volatility of the health care environment, the continual uncertainty created by rapidly evolving technology, and the continuing evolution of professional roles, health information professionals must tolerate and thrive in a world of unceasing change. The personal characteristics described here are not unique to library or information practice, but form an essential complement to the core areas of professional knowledge and skills delineated in succeeding pages.

## **Practice-related competencies:**

- conflict resolution
- delegation
- effective risk taking
- evidence-based decision making
- goal setting and outcomes assessment
- understanding of human and organizational behavior
- identification and anticipation of trends
- management of the change process
- political savvy and negotiation acumen
- superlative communication and interpersonal skills

## **Personal characteristics:**

- ability to work independently or in groups
- versatility
- adaptability and flexibility
- balance of personal and professional life
- creativity, imagination, and resourcefulness in problem solving
- curiosity and commitment to lifelong learning
- leadership skills and qualities

# HEALTH SCIENCES INFORMATION KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

**H**ealth sciences librarianship is multifaceted. The profession acknowledges the need for knowledge and skills that intersect equally important areas: the knowledgebases of the health sciences and the application of general information principles to the biomedical setting, specific health information systems, and management and personal skills. Health information professionals will possess varying levels of knowledge and skills in seven broad areas.

Different positions in a library demand a different mix of skills. No one individual can master all knowledge and every desirable skill, but every organization will require collective expertise in all areas. Individuals will emphasize different areas at different points in their career, with specific needs varying over time from assignment to assignment and by institutional setting.

The knowledge and skills are not listed in priority order and may be applicable to more than one area of practice.

## Health Sciences Environment and Information Policies

Health sciences librarians and information professionals must understand the contexts in which the need for bioscience and health sciences–related information emerges and the unique ways of perceiving and interpreting those environments. Therefore, they should be alert to changing information and health care environments including:

- clinical care, research, and education
- ethical, economic, privacy, copyright, and other legal issues
- cultural concerns
- current management and business practice
- major program and policy sources for the organization (hospital, academic medical center, or corporate)
- information technology
- biomedical, biotechnology, health insurance, and pharmaceutical industries
- health sciences professions, including system and structure, terminology, education and training patterns, and associations and organizations

In addition, health information professionals should be aware of issues and trends that impact the purpose, programs, policies, and activities of the government entities and other institutions that shape health care in the particular country in which they reside. For most MLA members, this would include:

- US Department of Health and Human Services and its related agencies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, Health Resources and Services Administration, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and more)
- MLA
- NLM
- Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
- health professional associations, such as the Association of American Medical Colleges, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, American Dental Association, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, and associations serving particular specialties or ethnic groups
- other information professionals associations, such as the American Medical Informatics Association
- major international institutions, such as the World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization

## Leadership and Management

Health information professionals effectively weave library and information science principles into the fabric of complex institutional environments. They also establish and sustain viable operations and relevant services for information resource centers. This requires specialized knowledge, skill, and understanding of leadership, finance, communication, and management, including:

- the institution's mission and the specific mission of the information resource center
- institutional planning processes
- decision-making strategies, prioritization, and allocation of resources
- human resources management, labor relations, and recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce
- staff development and mentoring
- project and program management and evaluation
- organizational structure, behavior, and collaboration
- finance and budgeting, cost analysis, and price setting
- fund-raising, proposal writing, and reporting
- demonstration of the importance of information professionals' knowledge and skills to achieving institutional goals
- forging and maintenance of alliances and collaborations with outlying universities, public libraries, public health services, community-based organizations, hospitals, and clinics, when and if applicable, and augmentation of services when appropriate
- public relations, marketing, and advertising services
- facilities planning and space allocation
- oral and written communication
- interpersonal relations

## Health Sciences Information Services

Health sciences librarians require knowledge of the content of information resources and skills in using them. They must understand the principles and practices related to providing information to meet specific user needs and to ensure convenient access to information in all forms, including:

- understanding of the information needs of health administrators, practitioners, researchers, educators, students, consumers, patients, commercial firms, and the general public
- ongoing assessment of their clients' information needs
- information resources in the health sciences and related fields and their relevance to specific information needs
- methods of information delivery and access
- development and/or implementation of services appropriate to meeting the unique needs of diverse populations
- management of electronic services

## Health Sciences Resource Management

Health sciences librarians manage resources in a broad range of formats. As technologies continue to evolve, this necessitates management of the latest digital products as well as primary and clinical research data sets. Expertise must include:

- knowledge and evaluation of content and format of resources in relation to user needs
- selection, acquisition, and control of resources
- negotiation of purchase and licensing of resources
- understanding of bibliometric techniques
- vocabulary development and standards
- creation and management of metadata and information access tools
- cataloging and classification theory and indexing, abstracting, classification, and taxonomy systems
- national and international standards and conventions
- conservation, preservation, and archiving of print and digital resources, including institutional repositories
- interfacing information resources, electronic health care and personal health records, and other clinical and research data sets
- scholarly communication issues and strategies
- publishing industry and resource vendors
- trends in information formatting, production, packaging, and dissemination
- copyright, licensing, privacy, and intellectual property issues
- institutional information policies

## Information Systems and Technology

Ongoing developments in technology reshape the goals and systems of health sciences librarianship and change the way information professionals function. Although required proficiency levels vary across specializations in the field, health sciences librarians must be able to understand and use technology and systems to manage all forms of information and must maintain awareness of information technology trends. They must master basic technology skills as well as their practical application. Important areas of knowledge include:

- basic principles of automated systems, including computer hardware and software, record and file construction, database and Website management systems, networking, and information technology security
- acquisition, use, and evaluation of information technologies
- systems analysis techniques, including design and evaluation
- communications and information infrastructure, including the Internet and Web
- data standards
- technological solutions for permanent access to electronic information
- informatics applications in emerging areas of biomedicine, computational biology, and health information
- electronic health care systems and records
- human behavior as it relates to technology
- integration of systems and technologies into the long-term information management needs and plans of the institution

## Curriculum Design and Instruction

An essential responsibility of the health sciences librarian is to teach ways to access, organize, and use information to solve problems. Health information professionals collaborate with other educators in health sciences curriculum design and delivery as well as offer stand-alone experiences. Effective instruction entails not only knowledge of the structure and content of the specific courses being taught and the technologies used to teach them, but also an understanding of and expertise in:

- adult learning theory and cognitive psychology
- curriculum and instructional development
- teaching informatics competencies and evidence-based decision making
- educational needs assessment and analysis
- learning style appraisal
- instructional methodologies, technologies, and systems design
- management of education services
- evaluation of learning outcomes
- information literacy, especially health information literacy
- work with curriculum committees and accrediting bodies

## Research, Analysis, and Interpretation

All health information professionals use published research either to provide information services to end users or to improve their practice as librarians. In either case, they need to retrieve, analyze, and appraise research literature. Some will also contribute to the knowledgebase of the profession by conducting original research and writing review articles. Whether using the published research of others or reporting their own findings, health information professionals require a core set of knowledge and abilities.

The basic research knowledge and skills are:

- ability to identify and define a research problem or question
- knowledge of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and which is best for a given study
- knowledge of common statistical techniques and their interpretation
- ability to understand statistical interpretations of research and assess whether the statistics support the conclusions
- ability to summarize research findings clearly and succinctly for informal reporting and formal publication
- ability to evaluate research findings for validity and usefulness

In addition, all health information professionals need to use principles of evidence-based practice to support decision making. Some health sciences librarians will also need to participate in differing roles as members of interdisciplinary research teams.

See MLA's research policy statement for a fuller discussion of the research roles and skills health information professionals employ.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Lifelong learning must be a cornerstone of every individual's professional development plan. Although graduate programs of library and information science education, MLA and its chapters and sections, NLM, employers, commercial vendors and publishers, and other professional associations are all potential providers of educational opportunities, the ultimate responsibility for lifelong learning and professional development rests with the individual.

Today's health information professionals have varied educational backgrounds and experiential knowledge. They will require ready access to continuing education and training opportunities to incorporate new technological developments, knowledgebases, and information management techniques into their practice.

In light of the rate of environmental change, the specific knowledge and skills required of health sciences librarians, and the broad scope of the continuum of learning, it is clear that all who have a stake in the success of the profession need to take action. Therefore, this document sets forth some general recommendations, then outlines specific recommendations for those who play key roles in the professional development of health information professionals.

## General Action Recommendations

1. Individuals must assume personal responsibility for aggressively seeking lifelong education and professional development opportunities from a variety of sources.

The teaching-learning process is two-sided. Quality educational systems and programs are available from a variety of sources. Providers have responsibility for maintaining quality instruction. Individuals, however, must determine their own learning goals, including additional formal degrees or certifications, then actively pursue those sources that best provide the necessary learning. This mutual pursuit of quality education must continue throughout the length of a professional's career.

2. Strategies must be developed to recruit a diverse group of bright, articulate, creative, and energetic individuals as health information professionals, including those who pursue formal training as librarians and those with degrees in related disciplines.

All partners in the educational process must actively promote strategies that ensure recruitment of promising individuals who demonstrate the basic skills and aptitude for achieving excellence in the field. Such candidates will evince analytic abilities, interpersonal skills, self-understanding, willingness to take risks, persuasiveness, keen intellect, appreciation for research, and an unquenchable desire to learn.

Because of new technologies, increased specialization in health care, and the emergence of new roles for the health sciences library, the character of library staffing will change. Those with degrees in education, computer technology, medical informatics, and related fields that offer topical expertise may be a necessary adjunct to traditional library and information science. Recruiting those with complementary training into a master's of library science program or integrating them into library operations should be given full consideration in an expansive, interdisciplinary recruitment initiative.

3. Ongoing collaboration among interdisciplinary educational providers and other partners must provide new opportunities in the continuum of learning.

MLA has benefited from partnering with other organizations to develop various educational programs. The association can continue to enhance service to its members by taking advantage of outside expertise wherever it may reside. This will allow MLA to offer innovative, high-impact models for curriculum content, design, methodology, and assessment.

4. Instructional systems must provide the impetus and forum for continued education of the educators.

The success of professional learning depends on well-informed, forward-looking providers of education and training. Educators must be supported in continuing their personal professional development, acquiring new pedagogical skills, refreshing their awareness of developments in librarianship and related disciplines, and demonstrating command of the competencies practicing librarians need. Each of the organizations, singly and in concert, provides direction to the educators who alter the contour of professional performance.

## Recommendations for Individual Health Information Professional

1. Every health sciences information professional must design and implement a plan for continuing professional development.  
Individuals bear the major responsibility for enhancing their own professional knowledge and skills. This document can be used as an outline to assess one's current level of mastery and to plan for further development. The Academy of Health Information Professionals is another way to help individuals chart, structure, and receive recognition for professional growth. Quality of performance can be increased by applying these professional skills to forward the mission and services of one's own institution, which ultimately also forwards one's own personal and professional growth.
2. All health information professionals must exercise leadership in and contribute to the development of the field.  
If health sciences librarianship is to thrive and be a force for improved health scholarship and research, then all health information professionals must advocate for and contribute to the programs that produce new graduates, the learning opportunities that enhance skills, an environment that advances the fulfillment of new roles and services, and the mentoring of other information professionals.
3. All health information professionals must uphold and advocate for the values of the profession and apply them to changing information environments.  
Health sciences librarians are key partners in developing information policy. They have unique expertise and experience, as well as an emphasis on access, user-centered information systems, and provision of authoritative and current information. Individual health information professionals should work to influence information policy at the institutional and national level and to ensure that the professional values in MLA's code of ethics are sustained.

## Recommendations for the Medical Library Association

1. MLA must set the standards for professional competency to assist employers in recruiting and retaining individuals who will be successful in the changing arena of health sciences librarianship.  
MLA must work with employers seeking to recruit individuals who are equipped to meet challenges in the changing technological arena of health information management. MLA can continue to provide guidance to employers by developing, updating, and distributing standards for professional competence and by describing ways to recognize competence; for example, through an employee's membership in the Academy of Health Information Professionals and/or participation in continuing education opportunities. Employers must also be made aware of the level of compensation required to recruit and retain such highly skilled staff through access to MLA salary data, particularly data that compare health sciences librarians' salaries with others who work in the information professions.
2. MLA must continue its leadership role in creating a vital and responsive professional development program and a dynamic set of coordinated education opportunities.  
Members have traditionally looked to MLA for continuing education opportunities. To meet the expanding needs of its members, MLA must broaden its offerings; forge new coalitions and relationships; and examine new delivery systems, teaching and learning strategies, and curricular options. MLA's professional development program must also include a program that assists members in assessing their own professional growth. MLA should ensure that the professional development program meets the current and future needs of the profession via an ongoing program evaluation component.
3. MLA must exercise leadership and work collaboratively with all participants in the educational arena.  
The MLA Board of Directors, executive director, staff, various working committees and task forces, and members must continually monitor and influence the range of educational programs available to information professionals. At times, MLA will wish to act independently to meet its members' needs. At other times, MLA will either collaborate with others or rely completely on the services or educational offerings of an outside agency. Such providers cover a broad spectrum, including universities or colleges, vendors, commercial trainers, individual entrepreneurs, and other professional associations.

4. MLA should promote adoption or development of staff development programs offered by employers.  
MLA can assist employers by compiling a DocKit with model staff development policies that exemplify the means to augment the skills of all levels of personnel in the library. MLA can widely promote this resource and encourage efforts to promote diversity in the work force.
5. MLA must maintain its formal liaison with schools of library and information science education.  
MLA should continue to be an active member of the Association for Library and Information Science Education. Likewise, MLA must maintain ongoing communication and collaboration with the deans or directors of library and information science programs and appropriate faculty members, particularly those programs and educators who offer specialized course work in health sciences librarianship.
6. MLA must design and implement a research agenda that advances the professional knowledgebase.  
In line with its strategic plan, MLA will need to advance the basic and applied knowledge of information management through research that allows practitioners to measure the state of health sciences library practice, compare longitudinal data, and draw new action plans. While pursuing research of particular interest to health sciences librarians, MLA also needs to foster research in the broader community of practice. MLA should collaborate with the association's rich diversity of affiliated partner organizations to develop a shared research agenda that identifies and encourages advancement in all areas of interest to the association, its units, and its members.

## **Recommendations for Employers**

1. Employers should recruit competent and promising individuals, including those with unique educational and professional backgrounds, to meet the information needs of the institution.  
Employers should articulate and practice high standards in recruiting individuals for their organizations. Recruitment practices should encourage diversity in the workplace as well as foster innovation and efficiency.  
In addition, employers should develop strategies for influencing the profession as a whole to recruit persons with outstanding ability, motivation, and knowledge. These strategies include providing feedback to other educational providers about qualities contributing to success on the job and rewarding persons for exceptional performance. Employers will benefit from involving health information professionals in working teams, committees, and other bodies.
2. Employers should place a high priority on staff development.  
A strong staff development program ensures that the institution will fulfill its mission and that staff will meet the demands of a changing environment. To be effective, a staff development program should balance institutional needs and professional growth objectives of the individual. The employer should assist individuals in assessing their own professional development and in designing programs for learning experiences. The institution should have a well-articulated staff development policy that recognizes a broad array of formal and informal sources within and outside the institution, outlines institutional and individual responsibility, and commits resources to support the program.  
In the context of this policy, the employer should provide high-quality, on-the-job training in appropriate areas that complement education from other sources. In so doing, the employer ensures that knowledge transfer and application take place in the job setting.

## **Recommendations for Library and Information Science Educators**

1. Graduate programs in library and information science must lay a broad foundation that stresses theory over application, places librarianship in context with other related disciplines, fosters professional values, and prepares students to design their own learning programs throughout the length of their careers.  
Every curriculum must provide a perspective on library and information science that is sufficiently broad to prepare students for a variety of possible job settings and roles as part of a multidisciplinary health team, both for now and in the future. Properly designed and executed, all library and information science education programs (not just those that offer a health sciences library specialization) lay the foundation on which a practicing librarian can build competent performance in a health sciences environment.

2. To support students who desire to work in a health sciences setting, educators need to offer flexible options for students to gain necessary skill sets.

Many library and information science programs will not be able to offer specialized courses or tracks that cover the areas of essential knowledge and skills articulated in this policy statement. Programs should, however, provide options to attain advanced knowledge through distance education, selection of courses from other departments, pursuit of dual degrees, and coursework from other domain-specific fields. As called for in the ALA standards, advisors should work with students to design a study plan that meets the student's learning objectives, including specialized understanding of the health sciences.

3. Educators should provide a range of programs and opportunities that meet needs throughout a professional career, rather than focus solely on the master's degree.

All practitioners have a lifelong need to retool their skills. All information professionals are expected to seek continuing education, and some will wish to acquire advanced certificates or doctoral degrees. Historically, library and information science education programs generally concentrated on new students and did not always recognize or respond to ongoing educational needs. Library educators, like their medical school counterparts who oversee continuing medical education programs, can coordinate a portfolio of courses, seminars, and institutes using a variety of instructors and educational techniques to support this end.

### **Recommendations for the National Library of Medicine**

1. NLM should continue to identify future directions and priorities for its activities to support the educational needs of health sciences librarians.

As the only medical library in the country with a national mission, NLM has special responsibilities that transcend individual institutions and constituencies. It provides leadership for those engaged in direct service to health professionals and in research about the process of health information management and delivery. Through its partnership with MLA and by other means, it should continue to address the educational needs of health information professionals.

2. NLM should also provide opportunities for health sciences librarians to acquire new knowledge and skills, such as identifying and funding centers of excellence in health information across the country.

Health sciences libraries are dramatically reshaping a changing electronic environment for knowledge acquisition, information management, and information transfer. This calls for new training programs, including those that couple hands-on experience to solve practical problems with exposure to new paradigms for information access and knowledge. Trainees will benefit from being able to transfer and apply new skills in various settings.

# TASK FORCE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY STATEMENT REVISION CHARGE AND MEMBERS

MLA President Joanne G. Marshall, FMLA, appointed the Task Force on Educational Policy Statement Revision and charged the group to:

- review and revise *Platform for Change* in light of the needs of MLA members and the changing educational environment, making recommendations for changes in content, structure, and title. The review should take into consideration the goals stated in MLA's strategic plan and the 2004/05 priorities and should result in an overall strategic statement of MLA's approach to education and professional development for its members in the future;
- explore how the revised statement can be used to restructure and enhance current programs and to develop new programs as required in collaboration with the Continuing Education Committee;
- initiate a dialogue among MLA members about the educational policy statement through an open forum at MLA '05; and
- liaise with the Task Force on Research Policy Statement Revision as appropriate.

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