

30 Years in the Evolution of an Organization

The Development of HealthLINE

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10-08

Overview

In thinking about the evolution and history of HealthLINE I realize that the technology of the time has formed and influenced the development of the group. There has always been an interest in cooperating and sharing. Initially it focused around interlibrary loan. That was the reason the group first formed, to try to get material among ourselves without paying fees that the larger library would charge.

Now we still do that type of sharing but with the availability of Docline we all have widely expanded opportunities to share. From an initial cooperative group limited to the DFW area, most of us have over 100 partners in our Docline cells, possibly based on special interest groups, and many even cooperate in FreeShare to potentially share freely around the world.

The burden of preparing compiled lists of journal holdings and locating interlibrary loan sources has eased due to computers, but at the same time those computers have created an increasing expansion of technology. For librarians to continue to adopt and harness new technology there is a growing need for regular continuing education. So while the foundation of cooperative interlibrary loan still remains, the value of HealthLINE's function as a continuing education resource seems to have grown.

The larger institutions with their training rooms full of computers have been invaluable to staff at the smaller libraries by sharing the continuing education opportunities they bring in for their own staff. However, the fact that the National Library of Medicine Network system supports free regional continuing education programs is also a huge factor. We are fortunate to have venues in the DFW area so that local librarians have the opportunity to take advantage of the courses they present.

The personal interactions built by networking at meetings and a dedication to the idea of cooperative sharing has been integral to the success of this local organization. Each person who has been in a leadership role has contributed their expertise, too. Over time we have developed a procedure manual (because someone noticed that the PTA had one and it was very useful), brochures, stationery, travel scholarships as a means of encouraging professional involvement for both members and students, a logo, fundraisers, and an award to honor distinguished members.

The most recent turning point came when Brian Bunnett focused his leadership term on investigating HealthLINE's long term goals and purposes. As a result we now have a Mentoring Committee, Communications Committee, Archives Committee and the Librarian of the Year Award (aka LOTY). Through these we are:

- making efforts to grow and support both our members and the students at the two local library schools by sharing our personal professional strengths and experience;
- strengthening our communication system -- growing from reliance on correspondence by mail to a listserv to adding a blog and now a website;
- looking inward by gathering and drawing upon our historical documents.

The recommendations resulting from that soul searching process have taken us to a higher level of organizational maturity.

Scene -- the early 1970s

Computers were big. Really big. Library school students learned keypunching, took their stacks of cards to the huge campus computer and picked up the printout the next day. With luck the program worked! Otherwise it was study the printout to find the error, reshuffle and/or retype a card or cards, then take them back to the computer building to try again.

Bibliographies were made by searching through books like the Reader's Guide. Index Medicus came out in print monthly and was then eventually cumulated annually into a huge, multivolume set. For those of us too cheap to purchase that, there was the microfiche version, and specialty groups produced their own subsets -- the Orthopedic Bibliography, for example. However, if you were willing to pay, Index Medicus could be searched on a computer! A highly skilled librarian had spent several weeks in training, maybe in Bethesda at the National Library of Medicine, to be able to negotiate the maze of performing a search on the MEDLINE database. It involved first working out all the proper MeSH terms and their relationships. The expert searchers had personal lists of compiled search terms called "hedges" and "explosions" that could speed their efforts once they successfully made contact with the computer.

Getting on the computer involved hooking a telephone to an acoustic coupler and going through the dial-in procedure. Once you were connected the charges started so you had to be quick and efficient. It was more cost effective simply to request that the resulting bibliography be mailed.

Document delivery involved the mail. If one of your users needed an article, an ALA-approved form was the means of obtaining it. The typed 4-part carbonized form was then mailed. Mainly it had to be mailed to the approved regional medical library for your area. There they filled the request and mailed the photocopy back with the form. Charges were managed by a clever system of coupons.

Professional organization interactions were by regular mail or an occasional long distance call (expensive). No quick note to a listserv that reaches librarians around the world in moments! For that reason professional meetings were especially valuable for meeting local colleagues and conducting business.

DFW Medical Library Groups Emerge

It was in this era of dependence on the mail and the regional library that the local health science library consortium began to emerge. Encouraged by the staff at the TALON office located at UTSW and due to a policy change (UTSW would no longer mail the physical bound volumes to other libraries but instead would charge for photocopying), the Dallas Health Science Consortium formed to share lists of journal holdings so that they could cooperatively share materials without the charges involved in borrowing from UTSW. The Fort Worth health science librarians had already started work on a "union list." The librarians knew each other because they all met together regularly at meetings of the Metroplex Council of Health Science Librarians. Eventually the Dallas and Fort Worth lists were merged into one thick bound volume. Barbara Pace and Linda Cheatum and the programmers at Wadley were heavily involved in the union list projects and revisions.

The libraries themselves were growing, too. TCOM had started in the mid 1970s in Fort Worth with Joan Swain as director. Sandy Echt joined her as a trained MEDLINE searcher and TCOM offered the only official MEDLINE computer access in Fort Worth. In 1976 TCOM doubled in professional staff by adding a full time cataloger, Ann Watley, and a serials librarian, Mary Peters (fresh out of UT library school). It also began its growth spurt, moving from its bowling alley location to River Plaza, then to the top floor of a new building on the campus and finally to its own building.

Other librarians active in the early period in Fort Worth included Jeanne Albrecht at John Peter Smith, Veda Durham at Harris, Lee Pelley and Sherry Thompson at Alcon. In Dallas Barbara Pace at St. Paul, Betty Freeman at Baylor, Catherine Manning at Wadley, Linda Cheatum at American Heart and Tommy Yardley at TWU were active. The early groups were really supported by UTSW and its TALON office. Carmel Bush and Regina Lee were very important in an advisory capacity.

The focus of those early groups was on interlibrary loan. We were organized at the basic library level so that we could avoid paying what UTSW (our official regional library for many years until HAM-TMC won the grant and took over) would charge for interlibrary loans. Since the purpose of D-TCCHSL was financial, to operate below the charging level of UTSW, UTSW was not eligible for institutional membership. The staff members could be Metroplex members though.

1980's

By the 1980s we had become heavy users of microfiche. Participants annually received a new list, so there was an involved process of submitting updates and compiling them, handled at TCOM by Sherry White for many years.

Then the process moved briefly to an OCLC system via SCAMeL. When NLM's SERHOLD was opened HealthLINE institutional members were fortunate because the existing members already had their holdings in the system and were grandfathered into SERHOLD. Joining D-TCCHSL required the librarian representative to submit their journal holdings for review by the group to see if the candidate institution would add anything of value to the group. Most libraries who were interested had unique and useful

materials to contribute even if they were small.

Some institutions, mostly the larger ones, had constraints and so were not able to share as freely. Those joined as associate institutional members. For many years Baylor offered members 10 free loans per year. UNTHSC offered half price loans. Later Baylor opened to free sharing.

With the availability of the union lists the librarian now had the option of mailing the ALA-approved form directly to a partner library who would not charge to send back a photocopy of an article. For a while the consortium cooperated with the Oklahoma librarians through their GOAL organization. One local librarian kept the official copy of the list to coordinate borrowing. Mary Jarvis and Jody Guenther were leaders in this process.

Another new development was the fax machine. We heard about this early on via a Metroplex meeting when Jody Guenther told us about it (it sounded so complicated!). For those lucky enough to have access to a fax machine it became possible to fax an interlibrary loan request --the ALA-approved form -- instead of mailing it. Of course mostly that was only done locally, but occasionally a long distance fee could be justified. That cut down on the time involved since the request could reach the supplier quickly. Then they would mail the article back.

Continuing education was always important, but it was unusual for the groups to provide anything that actually earned CE points. I believe CE points were only offered for full day course at the time. Mostly we had to get CE by attending MLA or SCC (except it had another name then, too). That was also before the Academy. Once the Academy was created people had a more official need to earn points but it was still a big deal to bring a CE course to the area.

In the early 1980s searches were still done with acoustic couplers. Smaller institutions could order searches from their regional library because it was more cost effective. Then came a new method of searching MEDLINE called Grateful Med. Although it still cost libraries to use, it made use of the new microcomputers that more people were beginning to have.

1990s

By the late 1980s and early 1990s the computer world was experiencing drastic changes in usability. The Internet, Internet Grateful Med, Loansome Doc, Docline, PubMed were developing. Then one day in 1997 suddenly PubMed became free to the world. Paradigm shift. If there was no charge to perform a search then the amount of time spent was not an important cost consideration.

Thanks to HealthLINE I knew about the Internet way before my researchers did. We heard about high def TV from Jody Guenther, too (and finally in 2008 it is a reality for normal programming!). HealthLINE has always been a way to hear and learn about new technology from our colleagues.

Even in the 1990s we were still using microfiche in many cases to locate a supplier for interlibrary loans. HealthLINE remained an important interlibrary loan resource. Say I had a list of 5 articles I needed. I would sit with the fiche and write down several locations for one request. Then I would move to the next request and look it up. After I had done that for all of them I would go through and decide where I would send each request since it was not proper etiquette to overload any one place. I also had a print list of titles available from other pediatric libraries.

Once SERHOLD became a factor, updating the journal holdings lists became an individual responsibility. With the lists included in a national computer system the task of compiling local union lists was lifted.

Joining Docline was a huge step. Contacting all the places to set up the cells was a big deal. However, my holdings list was already in the system so once the paperwork was done it fell into place and suddenly the time involved in locating interlibrary loan resources was cut dramatically. That was fortunate though because simultaneously the computer became accessible to more staff and with free PubMed access their requests for materials grew.

Creation of HealthLINE

Pre-HealthLINE our meetings consisted of a morning meeting of one group and an afternoon meeting of the same people organized as another group. The Metroplex Council of Health Science Librarians was more focused on programs and the Dallas Tarrant County Consortium of Health Science Libraries was more focused on the business of managing our union lists. Metroplex members were librarians. D-TCCHSL represented libraries. We always included a tour of the hosting library and tried to alternate between a Dallas area library and one in Fort Worth so that as many members as possible would be able to participate.

However, since we both elected officers from the same core of librarians, someone finally had the brilliant idea of merging the two groups, retaining the dual membership categories of individual and institutional. On January 19, 1989, the Health Libraries Information Network consortium "HealthLINE" was born. A committee worked out new bylaws. The new bylaws recorded the changes and the continued emphasis on ILL and networking.

From a somewhat informal, cooperative venture with a guiding purpose of saving money on interlibrary loans grew a new and stronger organization, HealthLINE.