

1-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Blobaum, Paul M. "Not So Fast: Perspectives on the Role of Hospital Librarians in Writing Peer Reviewed Publications and Supporting Scholarly Communications." *Journal of Hospital Librarianship* vol. 14 (1) January 2014, p. 80-87. doi:10.1080/15323269.2014.861308

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Not So Fast: Perspectives on the Role of Hospital Librarians in Writing Peer Reviewed
Publications and Supporting Scholarly Communications

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INTRODUCTION

The professional practice of hospital librarianship continues to evolve, and looks much different than a generation ago. The publishing world has changed significantly in recent years, particularly in the area of scholarly communications. Open Access mandates on the national and local levels and the explosion of online Open Access journals have created confusion for authors and librarians at all levels of the scholarly communication process. Solicitations for manuscripts arrive by email and appear in social media and web sites, preying on the unsuspecting author. The Hospital Librarian can help navigate the primordial soup of legitimate publications and low quality journals, and provide resources to help meet the needs of library users who are developing writing projects. This article will explore a model for developing and supporting a community of scholarly writers in the hospital setting, and present a theoretical framework for the hospital librarian to bring order to this fast changing, unfamiliar world of scholarly communications. Also, perspectives and reflections regarding the Hospital Librarian as author of journal articles in peer-reviewed journals will be explored.

SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS

The term “Scholarly Communications” refers to the dissemination of knowledge in articles submitted to reputable publishers who employ the practices of critical review and editing. Peer

review, the critique of an article by an author's peers, is a core value in scholarly communications which has been established through hundreds of years of practice. "Scholarly" refers both to the creation of new knowledge through research, and the editorial process by which the manuscript is reviewed and revised prior to the final publication.

The scholarly communication process is time consuming from writing to publication. A well written manuscript will take time to prepare. Following submission, articles will typically be sent to 2 to 5 reviewers for criticism and evaluation. Reviewers offer valuable feedback on clarity, organization, and validity of the article. One of the chief indicators of a low quality publication in the online environment is the promise of a quick turnaround time from acceptance to publication. The peer review process is slow, and the editorial process that includes copy editing and typesetting will also take time. A typical time frame from submission until publication should be expected to be in terms of months, even up to a year or more.

Peer reviewers are often chosen from authors already published in that journal, or from professional referrals. The main purpose of peer review is to ensure the highest quality articles possible are published. Editors consider evaluator's feedback when making acceptance decisions, but peer review is not only about gatekeeping and accepting articles. The peer review also benefits the author, giving the author valuable feedback on the manuscript to be considered for revision.

The writing process is a lifelong learning process. The development of resources and services to support writing and publishing should be carefully considered according to hospital needs and the librarian's comfort zone. The writer's motto is, "I can become a better writer."

METHODS

The Governors State University (GSU) Library's partnership with the University Writing Center is an academic model that focuses on students that might adapted for the hospital setting according to local needs. Workshops on conducting bibliographic research, writing a research paper, documenting sources, avoiding plagiarism, and paraphrasing sources are offered on a regular basis at the GSU Library, taught by librarians and writing center staff.

A Writing Helps page was developed for College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) students on each subject guide, supplementing the Writing Center web site (1). The Writing Center web pages provide access to a correctly formatted MS Word template formatted according to the APA publication style rules, and links to various writing web sites. Links to external documents describing how to write a systematic review, literature review, and common APA errors are listed. Also, a bibliography of publications supporting the writing and publishing process is provided with call numbers to locate materials on the shelf.

An overview of APA publication style presentation, "Documenting Sources Using APA Style, 6th Edition" was developed and presented upon request as part of bibliographic instruction sessions. Also, a 19 minute video of the APA presentation was produced using Camtasia, and published to You Tube. The YouTube video is embedded in the Writing Helps subject page. Free screen capture recording platforms such as Wink or Jing, or free trial versions of Camtasia and Captivate could also be used for recording online presentations. Free webinar platforms for online conferencing are now readily available such as Anymeeting (www.anymeeting.com), but free versions do not permit the recording of sessions for playback.

A Scholarly Publishing workshop was developed based on the model and materials used from a Midwest Chapter, Medical Library Association CE course in 2005, and is presented to faculty and staff occasionally. The content is customized to fit one hour to four hour time frames. Librarians have presented faculty development workshops on avoiding publishing scams and assessing the impact of their work by using citation metrics, such as impact factors and the H-Index.

Hospital librarians could also develop a writer's Brown Bag (lunch time) discussion group. The author formerly participated in a group with faculty from various disciplines over the course of a year. Each month, members of the group took turns to volunteer to share their "in progress" manuscript, and gaining insight and valuable feedback from the rest of the group.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review on publishing by hospital librarians was conducted of the Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts (LISTA), MEDLINE, and Web of Knowledge using the search terms "hospital librar*" and "writing OR publish*"; search terms were limited to the subject field.

In 1985, Weaver published a guest editorial in the BMLA, discussing barriers to writing and submission of manuscripts to the Bulletin, and an upcoming review of the journal's publication policies (2). In 1990 the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association editor Trudy Landwirth challenged hospital librarians to contribute to the Bulletin, but she acknowledged barriers (3). Landwirth found that the majority of Medical Library Association members were hospital librarians, but the majority of contributions to the BMLA were from academic

librarians. A commentary later that year written by Hull endorsed Landwirth's call, stating, "Our experience, knowledge, and assertiveness should be channeled into professional output" (4).

The literature provides little discussion of the role of a hospital librarian specifically in supporting the publishing process, but roles for medical librarians in general were proposed. Dudden's 2001 article discusses the role of the librarian in grant writing (5). Doyle et al. suggests ways that hospital librarians can teach and support the scholarly publishing process for authors in a hospital system (6). Kraft proposes a role for medical librarians in publishing newsletters and blogs (7). Dudden and Protzko discuss medical librarian's contributions to the systematic review article, suggesting the medical librarian could write the literature search research methodology section as well as conduct literature searches (8). Kovach recommends that librarians consider contributions as co-authors to the literature of family medicine through the partnering with residents and interns participating in the Family Physicians Inquiries Network (9).

In her 2009 introduction to the JMLA symposia on the Medical Library Association's Vital Pathways Project, M. J. Tooley calls for hospital librarians to share their knowledge through publications (10). The Vital Pathways project of the Medical Library Association thoroughly studied the status of American hospital libraries in response to mounting numbers of hospital library closures. Under the bullet point of "doing relevant research and sharing results" Tooley writes that hospital librarians should consider many of their normal activities as broadly falling into the category of research, such as program evaluations, usage studies, and feasibility studies. Further she writes, "Research results should be shared. Publications and presentations

locally, regionally, and nationally are imperative for information dissemination. Colleagues benefit from learning about each other's experiences" (10).

RESULTS

The Writing Helps web page which was published for the use of students is not heavily utilized in comparison with other subject pages, but instructors of scholarly publishing workshops are sought out for advice. The Librarians consult with faculty to identify journals likely to accept their manuscripts, and intervene to prevent faculty from being tricked by publishing scams. Information provided by the Library has also prevented academic departments from sponsoring travel to conferences sponsored by pseudo-journals with weak scholarly credentials.

Training on the evaluation of publications through metrics have helped faculty improve retention and promotion portfolios. The CHHS librarian serves on the University Personnel Committee (the faculty tenure and promotion committee) and has educated Committee members on identifying open access "vanity" publications which masquerade as legitimate journals.

Through writing and publishing and doing research on scholarly communications, the CHHS librarian has learned a great deal about the process and become a column editor for a journal, and also a reviewer of manuscripts for a Nursing journal.

DISCUSSION

The issue of hospital librarians in authoring professional communications arose in the medical library literature in an editorial in 1990 and then disappeared from the literature. The Journal of Hospital Librarianship, launched in 2001, provides an important platform for professional

communications in hospital librarianship. A column in the Medical Reference Services Quarterly also focuses on hospital librarianship. Unfortunately, the call for hospital librarians to write and publish by MLA leaders seems to have little impact on preventing hospital library closures over the years. Blogs, wikis, Twitter, Facebook pages, and web pages could not have been imagined in 2001, but have been adopted as standard communication tools by librarians and professional groups, and have proliferated. Some of these new media are considered by some to be vanity publications with little scholarly merit, but others are considered to be a new form of journalism.

The concerns voiced by Landwirth concerning hospital librarian's contributions to the literature have a new meaning in the era of 21st century online communications. Hospital librarians routinely participate in email discussion lists such as Medlib-L and publish blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and wikis. These fast communications that respond to questions, register complaints, and disseminate professional knowledge serve a unique purpose unimaginable to Landwirth in 1990 but cannot replace the slow process of publishing in peer reviewed journals.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Tooley's call for hospital librarians to publish their research deserves analysis and discussion (10). Weaver describes four barriers to librarians publishing in professional journals: lack of knowledge of the publishing process, inexperience, logistics, and lack of support. These barriers remain valid (2). The logistics of finding time to produce a well written manuscript that contributes to knowledge should be significant. Most significantly, hospital librarians who are

not also associated with an academic mission are not likely to write and publish. Academic librarians appointed to tenure track positions have a professional responsibility to create and disseminate new knowledge. Faculty on tenure track appointments also have uniquely had a level of professional autonomy and job protection under the historical values of academic freedom that few others enjoy when it comes to expressing opinion and reporting the results of their scholarship. Typically the tenure track librarian must undertake a scholarly agenda including conducting research, and publish at least one peer reviewed publication in order to attain tenure, in addition to highly rated performance in teaching and other areas. Faculty scholarship products and copyright are traditionally owned by the faculty rather than the employer, unless there is a contractual obligation. Tenure track faculty are “indemnified”, that is, protected from bearing the cost of litigation from their college or university employers, or from membership in a labor union, if institutional policies have been followed, or otherwise when academic freedom is challenged.

Tenure track faculty are also uniquely situated to write proposals for funding for awards from the National Network of the National Network, National Libraries of Medicine, or NLM research grants, depending on membership status with the NN/NLM. The reimbursable federal contract award mechanism might not be feasible for all institutions, however, but is a means to fund projects that could result in publications.

Academic librarians who are appointed off the tenure track do not have the same imperative to do research as tenure track faculty, nor do they receive release time from job responsibilities to do research. Travel budgets that support conference attendance may be limited, or nonexistent.

The typical hospital librarian in a community hospital will have little institutional support or responsibility to write and publish, even if they have an academic support mission, and little incentive to do so. More significantly, non-academic hospital librarians do not have the autonomy to establish a scholarly agenda, or write about their institution. The librarian's work is widely considered as administrative. The role of the librarian may be determined by upper administrators without much room for negotiation. The extent to which teaching, research, and service are in the institution's mission statement will also define the parameters of the librarian's activities.

The business imperative drives many hospitals to cultivate and carefully control a public image of the hospital, and hospital librarians may put their jobs in jeopardy if they publish without having their work approved by their institution. In a corporate environment, a librarian's publications might be considered "work for hire" and the employer may claim copyright ownership. The unique mission, goals, and expectations of the hospital will determine the boundaries of professional publications in that setting.

This situation does not prevent many hospital librarians from being active as officers in professional groups, presenting poster sessions and papers, and organizing professional meetings. Hospital librarians are also prolific contributors to newsletters and social media. The publishing of a blog or wiki which is not a part of the employer contract does carry some liability risk not found in scholarly communications. The threat of a lawsuit will adversely affect a hospital librarian who has little protections afforded by academic freedom.

CONCLUSIONS

Academic librarians have a unique opportunity and responsibility to undertake a research agenda that includes research of importance to hospital libraries and hospital librarians, especially those on tenure track. Partnerships between academic and community based hospital libraries have been successful in the past, and could result with the academic librarian serving as first author and community hospital librarians serving as co-authors. Academic librarians can mentor others, and leverage consortia and professional networks to accomplish research agenda.

Hospital librarians have opportunities to teach the scholarly publishing process in one-on-one and group settings and develop resources for library users. Hospital librarians will benefit from undertaking writing projects themselves and so will the hospital community, but such undertakings may not be feasible. Hospital Librarians might not be willing to edit manuscripts for staff and physicians, but the opportunity to be a peer reviewer for a journal is a valuable experience. It is important that hospital librarians gain knowledge of the peer review process through experience, reading, or workshops in order to help authors evaluate potential journals for publication and avoid pitfalls. Much support and information on the scholarly publishing process can be found through consortia, CE, professional associations, and in the literature and on the Web. Numerous monographs and articles have been published on the topic of librarians and publishing. The publishing process is an activity that has a beginning, middle, and a final product, a process that might balance other never-ending responsibilities in the hospital library. Writing and publishing can be a source of professional satisfaction and enjoyment, and is well worth the effort.

Appendix A

Article Types for Consideration of Librarians

Reviews: Books, multimedia, literature reviews, evidence based practice, technology assessments, systematic reviews,

Opinions: Letters to the editor, guest editorial, commentaries

Original research (Systemic investigations):

Empirical research (Qualitative, quantitative – research that formulates and answers a research question)

Case Report

Pilot studies

Feasibility Studies

Bibliographies: Core title lists, annotated bibliographies, subject bibliographies

Biographical sketches

Reports: Program and project evaluations,

Perspectives

Policy analysis, policy development

Theory

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