Medical Reference Meeting Notes

The Reference and Instruction Roundtable met for two meetings to discuss medical reference. The first meeting took place on September 20 at Darien Library, with 18 attending. The second meeting took place on September 27 at Noah Webster Library in West Hartford, with 21 attending. These notes represent both meetings. Please see the individual meeting agendas, included on the blog as PDFs, for specific details about each individual meeting.

Welcome & CLC Remarks
Christie welcomed attendees. In Darien, she introduced Alena Principato, Member Relations Manager, Public & Special Libraries, Connecticut Library Consortium, who spoke briefly about CLC business. In West Hartford, Julie Yulo-Medeiros, Member Relations Manager, School & Academic Libraries, CLC, spoke to the group.

Agenda
Rachel presented the agenda for the meeting.

Presentations
We were fortunate to have very informative presentations at each meeting.

Wendy Urciuoli, Patient & Family Resource Librarian, UConn Health, Lyman Maynard Stowe Library

Wendy spoke to the group about resources and services available to the public and librarians from the UConn Health Library. She also talked to us about a number of very high-quality and reliable medical websites, which she made available on a handout titled “Quick Guide to Online Consumer Health Resources.” That handout is available as a PDF on this blog.

UConn Health Center library is open to the public. When in the library, patrons have access to:

- Online journals and databases
- Books
- Journals
- Library instruction
- Graphic medicine collection (UConn has a strong collection of graphic novels on all aspects of medicine; they find that the medium promotes empathy, facilitates understanding, challenges preconceptions of illness, and more)

From off campus, patrons can access many resources through the website, including their 33 subject guides. The Consumer Health Resources Guide may be particularly relevant for patrons. There is a For Librarians section of this guide, as well as topics like Drugs & Supplements and Non-English Language Health Materials. Other subject guide topics include Women’s Health, Mental Health Resources, and more. Note: The online databases and journals are not available off campus.

A few websites Wendy mentioned that she thinks are especially helpful:

- www.dailymed.com
- www.healthtalk.org
- www.nutrition.gov
Again, please see the handout “Quick Guide to Online Consumer Health Resources” for a full list of recommended websites.

**Wellness Through Answers:** This is a replacement for HealthNet. Wellness Through Answers is a free, confidential research service wherein a librarian will research a health issue and give personalized results. The brochure states it is for patients and families, but Wendy assured us it is for all CT residents. **Note:** This service is not currently mentioned on the UConn Health Center Library website.

**HealthNet News:** UConn puts out a bimonthly newsletter on health news.

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Margot Malachowski, Education and Outreach Specialist, New England Region, National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM)

Margot spoke to the meeting at the Noah Webster Library in West Hartford. She spoke about the many resources made available through the NNLM and NLM. She also spoke at length about MedlinePlus. She stressed to us that the NNLM has a mandate to reach out to and support public libraries through funding and training.

**Funding:** NNLM has money to give! NNLM can fund projects that “improve access to health information, increase engagement with research and data, expand professional knowledge, and support outreach that promotes awareness and use of NLM resources in local communities.” Margot gave some examples of funding that has been given out. You can see a list of some past funded projects here: [https://nnlm.gov/funding/funded/](https://nnlm.gov/funding/funded/).

NNLM will pay $75 for the course Stand Up for Health, which is designed for public libraries. Next session is October 29 to December 2. See below for more information.

**Training:** The NNLM offers an extensive list of classes for librarians, many of which are free. You can see a list of the classes here: [https://nnlm.gov/classes](https://nnlm.gov/classes). There are live online classes that are upcoming as well as on demand classes that can be taken at any time. Margot also mentioned that they offer training on searching MedlinePlus and PubMed. If you have a need for continuing education, you can earn 12 CE credits. This class is eligible for the MLA’s [Consumer Health Information Specialization](https://nnlm.gov/funding/funded/) continuing education credit awarded by the Medical Library Association.

**MedlinePlus:** As Margot said, MedlinePlus is “Better than Google.” Medline Plus is a consumer-friendly health information resource and database made available from the National Library of Medicine. The site offers:

- Access to research
- Over 1,000 topics, diseases, conditions
- Lab test information
- Privacy – no login required

Medline Plus has made a big push to include lots of materials in Spanish. Other languages are represented as well, but not necessarily comprehensive.
Carolyn spoke to the group about the Dr. Steven Mickley Community Health Resource Section of the Greenwich Hospital Medical Library and the resources they make available to the public.

**About the Library:** The Dr. Steven Mickley Community Health Resource Section of the library, which opened in 2015, was a gift to the hospital from an anonymous donor to honor Dr. Mickley. According to their mission statement: “The Greenwich Hospital Community Health Resource Section encourages, enables, and supports patients, families, and the community at large to make informed decisions about their healthcare needs.” The library is open to the public—anyone can come and use their resources. They are located on the first floor of Greenwich Hospital and are open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visitors may borrow books.

The library’s website can be found at: [http://libguides.greenhosp.org/communityhealthsection](http://libguides.greenhosp.org/communityhealthsection). The site includes links to reliable health information and organizations and covers a wide variety of consumer health topics as well as health news and health literacy tutorials. The library can also be found on social media on Twitter and Facebook.

**In the Library:** Visitors can access consumer health books, a reference collection, magazines, online resources, brochures, and monthly health observances. They also offer public computers and printer, free Wi-Fi, and a reading area.

The library also offers:
- free, confidential health information services
- searching tutorials
- recommended websites

**Recommended Websites:** Carolyn highly recommends Get Healthy CT at [http://www.gethealthyct.org/dev/](http://www.gethealthyct.org/dev/). They send out monthly health features, which includes a PDF packet of carefully selected ready-to-print documents in English and Spanish on the selected topic—an easy way for busy librarians outside of the medical field to just print and put on display. Carolyn also shared some of her favorite resources, which include NIH, Cancer.net and Cancer.org, and FamilyDoctor.org.

Carole Clark, Adult Services Librarian, Ridgefield Library

Carole, who is an experienced medical librarian with experience at the Mayo Clinic as well as the Planetree Consumer Health Library in San Jose, California spoke to the group about medical reference collections. She created a core medical reference collection for Ridgefield Library, based in part on guidance received from a PLA pre-conference given by the NNLM called Stand Up for Health. She chose to pull the collection from the stacks and house it in a central location that would be easy for patrons to browse. She included periodicals, brochures, and handouts as well as clear signage.

Carole also reviewed key reliable publishers that should be central to medical reference collection development. She also discussed the Ridgefield Library’s decision to put certain publications on standing order. Collection development guidelines recommend that books on treatments and other more timely
medical topics should be kept for just five years. Books on topics such as coping techniques and anatomy can be kept longer as their relevance would not likely diminish over five years.

Sally Ijams, Head of Knowledge and Learning Services
& Brittany Netherton, Knowledge and Learning Services Librarian,
Darien Library

Sally and Brittany presented about a program at Darien Library about finding reliable health resources (Sally presented at the Darien meeting; Brittany presented at West Hartford meeting). They had initially had a program on fake news/reliable resources. At the end of the Q&A, someone asked whether WebMD was a reliable health news site. When the librarian answered no, the audience gasped. That fact, coupled with a number of seniors approaching the reference desk with questions about “miracle cures” they’d seen online, prompted them to develop a program specifically addressing finding reliable health information.

The program shared a number of humorous examples of click bait to miracle cures, putting the audience at ease by making them laugh...and also making them not feel so bad if they might have fallen for similar ads. They then explained how patrons can look for clues about websites to tell whether they are reliable. They also pointed out that some claims are simply just too good to be true. They highlighted a number of reliable websites that can be used to check if something is real, such as snopes.com, nonprofit associations related to a specific health condition (e.g., American Heart Association, American Cancer Society), and the Better Business Bureau. They also talked about searching on medlineplus.gov. And last but not least, ask a librarian!

**Review of Guidance and Best Practices**
Christie and Rachel presented guidance and best practices from professional organizations. Most of these were made available as handouts in the folders given to attendees. We have made these available as PDFs on this blog.
- RUSA Health and Medical Reference Guidelines (Christie)
- Mental Health Issues, a Toolkit from the Association of Specialized Government and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASGCLA), a division of the American Library Association (Rachel)
- Mental Health Guidance from NNLM Course "Caring for the Mind: Providing Mental Health Information at Your Library" (Rachel)
- Connecticut State Library Guidance on Health Literacy (Christie)
- Libraries Transform and Health Literacy Month (Christie)
- Medical Library Association’s publication "Find Good Health Information" (Rachel)

**Group Discussion**
At both meetings, we had a lively discussion about medical reference in our libraries. Here are some of the topics we discussed.

**Signage:** Are there ways we can use signs, shelf guides, etc., to help patrons be able to look for medical and mental health books without asking for help?

**Disclaimers:** We discussed adding disclaimers to our health-related brochures, etc., that clearly states we are not dispensing medical information and that our materials should be used for informational purposes only, as per RUSA guidelines.
Brochures: Many of us have had great success with brochures on medical and mental health topics. In fact, many libraries find it hard to keep them stocked! One library discussed their plan to create a large display of medical and mental health brochures that would be placed in an area in the stacks where they could look over the brochures with a great degree of privacy. This is due to the stigma that surrounds mental illness and the reluctance some patrons may feel to ask for information on these topics. A couple of librarians shared that their libraries place mental health brochures in restrooms so patrons can grab them with no one seeing.

Boundaries: Several librarians discussed the challenge of patrons who want them to help with health decisions: interpreting medical results, making health decisions, etc. We discussed some ways to make it clear to patrons that we are not medical professionals and cannot help them with anything outside of our professional purview. Another issue that arose was with patrons asking questions about the medical insurance.

Privacy: We talked about ways to help ensure a private conversation with patrons on medical and mental health topics. Examples of ways to do this included walking to a more private area away from the desk and letting them know that anything they discuss is confidential. On a related note, a librarian mentioned Privacy Badger, which is an app that alerts people to how many trackers are on a given website—and blocks them. Some patrons may be very concerned about privacy and tracking, especially when health or mental health topics are being searched. This may be something that would help with these concerns.

Training: There is a lot of training available to librarians through NLM and NNLM on medical reference and more. Check them out! Some librarians talked about training they have received about dealing with mental health issues in the library. Consult with your local social services and health organizations to see if such training is available.

Collection Development: We discussed collection development decisions we have to make regarding medical books—they can be quite expensive and many become out-of-date quickly. Are they being checked out? How much use do reference materials get? What portion of a budget should be allotted to brochures instead of books? What about digital and even virtual reality resources?

Instruction: We talked about how great MedlinePlus is—and how hard it can be to get patrons to know about and use it. We talked about ways we might be able to teach about MedlinePlus.

Next Steps for the Roundtable
We wrapped up the meeting with some roundtable news:

1. Our next meeting in November will be on arts reference. We will meet in Hartford at the Wadsworth Atheneum on November 1st and in New Haven at the Yale Arts Library on November 8th. Stay tuned for details about presenters!

2. After that, we are tentatively planning on meetings on:
   - Genealogy
   - Legal Reference
   - Instruction & Blended Learning
3. We have had a few requests to start a method of electronic communication for the group. We will be looking into a listserv and other options.

4. We have been thinking about meeting monthly instead of every other month. We envision the alternate months to be more of a discussion and sharing/networking event, rather than professional development meetings like this one.

5. We’re interested in continuing to meet at different libraries. If any of you would like to host a meeting, please let us know. We can always host meetings at Ridgefield, but we don’t want people to have to travel there each time!

6. We’ve been working on legal survey interviews—asking people who work in law-related information organizations, like law school libraries, prison libraries, court service centers, judicial libraries, and organizations like the ACLU, Lambda Legal Fund, and Legal Aid. Through this project, we are hoping to:
   - raise awareness of legal reference work in all its facets
   - help patrons to find the legal resources they need
   - foster connections between different types of libraries and librarians across Connecticut.

We anticipate writing a synopsis and making all responses available. Stayed tuned for those!