

B. MEDICAL LIBRARY IS A MEMBER OF THE  
ATLANTA HEALTH SCIENCE LIBRARIES CONSORTIUM

**In its brief existence, this consortium has proven itself to be a practical and viable force in the Atlanta health community.**

## Cooperative Library Services for Atlanta's Hospitals

STEPHEN M. KOPLAN, CATHERINE J. CHEWNING and  
JANE BUMGARNER, *Atlanta\**

**A**ESOP'S FABLE, "The Bundle of Sticks" has a valid basis in the health science library. In the story, a father whose sons are quarreling takes several sticks and ties them into a bundle. Each son is then asked to break the bundle in half. None can do so. The father then unties the bundles and asks his sons to split each stick. The latter find this an easy accomplishment. The moral of the story is that a united effort will produce a stronger result than an individual one. Libraries today are employing this concept to improve their services. Rising economic problems coupled with ever increasing library needs due to the "information explosion" require that librarians look beyond immediate boundaries to supply necessary services.

Cooperation among libraries is not a new idea. Interlibrary loaning and borrowing of books and journals have been going on for many years on an irregular basis. In addition to this type of association, structured academic library networks have existed throughout the country. Examples include the New England Library Network (based in Boston) and the Ohio College Library Center (based in Columbus).

Nationwide medical library networks, called Regional Medical Library Programs, consist of major medical center libraries in each of eleven specially created geographic regions. Georgia is part of the Southeast Regional Medical Library Program (SERMLP) headquartered at Emory University in Atlanta. This program serves the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee as well as the Commonwealth of Puerto

Rico. At least one medical school facility from each of these locations participates. Among the services offered by SERMLP are document delivery, supervision of library applications for federal grants and sponsorship of continuing education courses.

### Dependence on Larger Libraries

While programs such as SERMLP support the sharing of informational wealth, they continue to allow small-to-medium sized health science libraries to be dependent upon larger libraries affiliated with major medical facilities. Practically speaking, this approach to inter-library association also causes a drain on the resources of the larger libraries. Thus, instead of utilizing each other's resources, smaller libraries merely increase their demands on those of the larger facilities.

As an alternative to this negative outcome, groups of small-to-medium sized libraries have joined forces and organized into consortia. A consortium is a gathering of persons or institutions for mutual benefit. In this case, libraries join together to share resources and services. One successful demonstration of this concept is the Consortium for Information Resources of the West Suburban Hospital Association formed in 1973 near Boston to coordinate the library services of various community hospitals. Their cooperative library projects have included production of a consolidated list of periodicals received by the participating libraries, installation of a MEDLINE terminal, and other projects beneficial to library consumers.

A program similar to that in Boston has been formed by health science librarians from metropolitan Atlanta. Prior to this action, they had become heavily dependent upon the resources of the A. W. Calhoun Library of Emory University to fill their re-

\* Mr. Koplan is assistant to the director of libraries of the Georgia Mental Health Institute, 1256 Briarcliff Road, Atlanta, Ga. 30306 and chairman of the Atlanta Health Science Libraries Consortium. Mrs. Chewning is the assistant librarian of the Southern School of Pharmacy at Mercer University in Atlanta and vice chairman of the Consortium. Mrs. Bumgarner serves as librarian at Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta and secretary of the Consortium.

quests for books and journal articles. After a review of the needed items it was felt that much of the borrowing from the Calhoun Library could have been done amongst the smaller libraries in the area. For example, the more commonly held journals such as *New England Journal of Medicine* and *JAMA* were available from local sources other than Emory. Furthermore, journals less easily available could be obtained, when necessary, from some of the specialized libraries and shared among consortium members. In this way, a balanced library service system utilizing complementary resources would be created.

With these concepts in mind, a group of seven health science librarians met in October, 1974 to form the Atlanta Health Science Libraries Consortium. Institutions represented included the Georgia Mental Health Institute, Southern School of Pharmacy of Mercer University, Piedmont Hospital, Georgia Baptist Hospital, St. Joseph's Infirmary, DeKalb General Hospital and Northside Hospital. These were later supplemented by the Georgia Baptist Hospital School of Nursing, the Georgia Department of Human Resources, the Atlanta Veterans' Administration Hospital, the Georgia Retardation Center, the Emory University School of Dentistry and the Yerkes Primate Center. Unlike their counterparts in Boston, the cooperative effort initiated by the Atlanta librarians was administratively independent from their institutions. It was hoped that a common concern for various problems would be enough to produce a unified effort.

### **Threat from Copyright Bill**

One immediate problem which drew all the librarians together was their concern about a pending copyright bill (S. 1361, Sec. 108, G(2)) to make "systematic photocopying" illegal. Due to the ever increasing amounts of information published and the constant rise in its cost, it has been found practical to photocopy an article requested from one library by another. Otherwise, it would be necessary to mail or transport the needed volume to the requesting library or force libraries to increase costs and use valuable research time asking publishers' permission to photocopy articles. With such difficulties in mind the ideal initial project for the Consortium was opposition to the copyright bill.

Librarians at each participating library sent a telegram to the Congressman in the district in which the library was located urging him to oppose section 108 G(2). They also contacted influential staff members in each of their institutions and urged them to write letters to their Congressmen. The group's actions were not only useful in solidifying

personal contact amongst themselves but also produced a great deal of positive response from those contacted. The librarians were frequently being questioned about the progress of the bill. Clearly, this amount of interaction indicated that there was more than a passing interest in the outcome. The bill has passed the Senate and is pending in the House where it has been numbered HR-2223. Recently the Supreme Court ruled that under the present law libraries can make single photocopies for research or educational purposes. The copyright issue, however, is still a controversial one and the Consortium members will need to keep an eye out for further developments.

As a further step towards the development of an effective Consortium, the librarians from the participating institutions decided to establish a system to enable them to borrow requested material from one another. This, it seemed, would hopefully decrease the marked dependence upon the resources of the A. W. Calhoun Medical Library. Since DeKalb General Hospital was identified as having the smallest collection of journals it had the greatest need to borrow from other Consortium members. Statistics were kept using that hospital's library as a model for determination of intra-Consortium borrowing as opposed to borrowing from the Calhoun Library. The data revealed that approximately half of the inter-library loans from DeKalb General Hospital came from the Calhoun Library and the other half from within the Consortium. The borrowed material would have previously been almost exclusively requested from the former. This seemed to indicate that the member libraries could duplicate as well as complement the resources of the Calhoun collection. The borrowing practice was therefore expanded to include all members.

Periodical holdings lists from most libraries have now been distributed to members in order to make possible easy identification of materials. A single combined list is presently in preparation. This tool should make it both faster and easier to transmit greatly needed information in the Atlanta health services community.

It is hoped that in the future the Consortium will publish a monthly newsletter containing library information of interest to health professionals throughout Atlanta. Other projected Consortium activities include MEDLINE service and a consulting service for newly formed health science libraries in the area. Members of the staff of the A. W. Calhoun Medical Library serve as consultants to the Consortium.

In its brief existence, the Atlanta Health Science Libraries Consortium has proven itself to be a practical and viable force in the Atlanta health community. Similar programs are under consideration

among librarians in Augusta and Rome, Georgia.

Using combined resources health science librarians can meet the expanding "information explosion" and in addition help to maintain fiscal control in a difficult economic situation. The development of consortia will, furthermore help to increase awareness of library activities among health care institutions. It could be argued, of course, that access to some of the literature will be limited if subscriptions are decreased. However, many rarely used titles within the Consortium are now shared by the participating libraries at a fraction of the cost of several individual subscriptions.

Hopefully, these many factors have demonstrated the ever-increasing need for cooperative library programs in health care institutions.

### Acknowledgments

*We wish to thank the many persons who gave their time and efforts in the preparation of this article. We regret that space does not permit us to list them all by name, particularly the entire Consortium membership.* ■

### SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Patrick, Ruth J.: *Guidelines for Library Cooperation; Development of Academic Library Consortia*; Santa Monica, California: System Development Corporation, 1972.
2. West, Kelly M.: Library and information services for small hospitals; *JAMA* 232:505-508, 1975.
3. West Suburban Hospital Association. Consortium for Information Resources. *Dynamics of Hospital Library Consortia*; Waltham, Mass.: West Suburban Hospital Research and Education Association, Inc., 1975.