

A DECADE OF PARTNERSHIP IN LIBRARY EDUCATION BETWEEN MCGILL UNIVERSITY AND CHINA MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

By Frances Groen

Introduction

Since its beginning in 1986 the cooperative program between China Medical University and its Library and McGill University and its Health Sciences Library has been characterized by commitment to a sustained project and concern for the mutual benefits of each of the libraries. Staff at both institutions were equally committed to the personal enrichment of their colleagues, and the results of this ten year cooperation have been beneficial for all concerned.

Development of the Project

In 1986, an exchange program between China Medical University (CMU) and McGill University was established with the following objectives:

1. an exchange of library and other university publications;
2. the exchange of photocopies of requested inter-library loans, provided that national library resources are unable to provide the materials needed;
3. cooperation in responding to difficult reference questions;
4. cooperation in the selection and acquisition of Canadian and Chinese medical publications and in completing collections,
5. the exchange of information of mutual interest such as library statistics and cooperative research projects;
6. the provision of training at the McGill Health Sciences library to staff of the library of the China Medical University;
7. further visits by McGill Health Sciences Library staff to the China Medical University.

Dr. Xiong Dizhi visited McGill University in the spring of 1988. Medline had very recently become available on CD-ROM and was a priority for Mr. Xiong, as were issues of professional development, staff evaluation, and medical library

education. Most importantly, Mr. Xiong was able to guide staff of the Health Sciences Library regarding the next important stage of the project, the training at the McGill Health Sciences Library of interns from China Medical University. The two selected interns arrived together in October, 1988 and followed parallel but somewhat independent paths. Mr. Liu, Shuchun, Assistant Acquisitions Head at CMU, wished to develop his competency in the acquisition of monographs and serials and in general microcomputer applications in libraries. Mrs. Cheng, Yumin, Head of Reference, arrived with an excellent knowledge of MeSH headings, and spent much of her three months in acquiring skills in MEDLINE searching on CD-ROM. A highlight of her visit occurred when the President of Beijing Medical University visited McGill University, and Mrs. Cheng was able to demonstrate this technology to him.

In August, 1989, David Crawford, Project Director at McGill, visited China Medical University to review the success of Mrs. Cheng and Mr. Liu and to lecture to students of the recently established Faculty of Medical Library and Information Science at CMU. In the fall of 1990, the Computer Services Librarian, Angella Lambrou spent one month at China Medical University. Miss Lambrou concentrated on the theory of online searching and CD-ROM technology with emphasis on practical sessions. In the spring 1993, one of CMU's young teachers, Zhao, Yuhong, visited McGill for a three month internship. In fall 1993 Anneli Lukka, cataloguing supervisor in the Health Sciences Library of McGill University taught cataloguing. During all these visits personal friendships as well as professional expertise were developed.

During the author's two previous visits to China, in 1991 and 1994, I have been involved in teaching the students in the medical library program and the staff of the library. Seminars and lectures were given to staff and students on collection development, history of medicine, medical library management and resource sharing. The staff of the Library were particularly interested in performance appraisal, a decidedly North American phenomenon, and related management issues. All library staff and all students in the library studies program were able to attend most courses.

Medical Library Education contrasted

During my first visit, a unique opportunity was given to me by Dr. Xiong when he arranged a colloquium with the Deans of the Medical Library programs in Northeast China. This invaluable learning experience provided the basis for the second part of this paper in which education for medical librarianship in China and in North America are contrasted.

Education for medical librarianship in North America and in China has taken a different road. This may be attributed to the absence of a hierarchy of the professions in China where the medical librarian is not necessarily viewed as holding a less prestigious position than the physician. This contrast may also be attributed to the lack of significant differences in salaries between members of these professions in China. For whatever reason, social, economic or cultural, the programs are in market contrast. North American medical librarianship has developed historically within the overall context of graduate education for librarianship in general. It has traditionally taken the form of one or several courses in medical librarianship and medical bibliography offered as an optimal course in the masters program. Historically the view has been that specialization could only be undertaken once a basic, general education in librarianship had been obtained. In contrast, the Chinese program requires basic medical training before the student embarks on training in medical librarianship; the North American practice requires basic education in library and information science, before proceeding with training in medical librarianship.

The Changing Role of the Medical Librarian

Progress in the biomedical sciences and advancements in information technology have combined to re-define the role of the medical librarian in North America. Reform in the medical curriculum in recognition of a new philosophy of cognition based upon problem solving, rather than the accumulation of facts has also had an impact on the medical library. The librarian is becoming a part of the medical curriculum through an increasing involvement in the education of students in information retrieval and the management and evaluation of medical information. Formal teaching is a comparatively new role for the medical librarian, but the need for this expanded role is growing as more sophisticated medical information systems are becoming available.

The experience in the People's Republic of China is both similar and different. The rapid advances in scientific medicine and technology have not had the same accelerated impact upon the Chinese medical librarians. Yet, with the greater and ever-increasing exchange between Western and Chinese health and information professionals and the development of a Chinese Internet, the development of technological applications in the library are accelerated. Most importantly, the implementation of a coordinated regional medical library program for all China is resulting in increased cooperation and the need for more technology to support information sharing amongst medical libraries. Any improvement in the telecommunications infrastructure is likely to impact on the delivery of medical information in future. The availability of a well-trained cadre of highly skilled

medical librarians, educated in both medicine and information science will provide a rich reservoir of skilled professional talent for Chinese medical librarianship, as these new graduates assume leadership roles in the Chinese medical library of the future.

Chinese medical librarianship provides the profession with insight into an emerging outlet for the knowledge and skills of medical librarians. With their skills in medicine and computers as well as their knowledge of foreign languages, in particular, English, graduates of programs in medical librarianship are assuming new roles in medical publishing, as medical editors and in research. Their indexing knowledge is an added contribution to their work in medical publishing. In the medical librarianship programs in Northeast China, in 1995, six recent graduates from China Medical University, assumed roles in this area, principally as junior medical editors. Editors of medical journals are invited to teach students the basics of medical editing as preparation for this specialization.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The China Medical University-McGill University joint venture has proven successful in the effectiveness of human resources development, project continuity, transfer of information technology and the vital strengthening of library collections and services. In particular, the following achievements are identified.

1. Staff members of both institutions have been exposed to new ideas through the exchange of staff.
2. China Medical University was the first Chinese medical library to provide CD-ROM Medline. McGill advised on a CD-ROM vendor, training, and file mounting. Joint purchasing occurs through the two institutions.
3. McGill staff have been exposed to a different culture and have had the chance to learn to teach in a new environment.
4. Publication exchange has provided McGill with useful medical and history of medicine publications and China Medical University has received many gifts of missing serials volumes from McGill.

The „twinning“ of libraries is familiar and one reason twinning is successful is the personal commitment of people. Staff at both China Medical University and McGill have wanted this program to be successful. They have devoted large amounts of personal energy to making it succeed.

References

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