



**Chapter Council Presents
Sharing Roundtables
MLA Annual Meeting
San Antonio, TX
Monday, May 16, 2005**

Table 12B: Expert Searching

Facilitator: Shirley Gronholm

Recorder: Jan Schueller

Additional Participants: Sandy Baxter, Linda Clement, Jen De Richemond, Peter Droese, Liisa Rogers, Marion Severy

Discussion:

The participants reflected a broad spectrum of institutions: community-based hospital, corporate research center, consumer health organization, VA hospital, biotech company, medical writer, state health and human services agency. However, most are also in one-person or one-professional libraries. It was within this context that the discussion went forward. Without initially considering the MLA definition of ‘expert searching’ which pertains to mediated searches requested by a user and performed by an expert information professional, roundtable members focused first on users who consider themselves expert searchers or want to become experts and how the librarian deals with them. “Expert” in this context conveys “experience”. There is concern over these end users who typically retrieve either too many or too few citations. It was acknowledged that dealing with these users requires consideration of egos and self-esteem. We need to deal with “information politics” and the fear some physicians and PhDs have of losing power when they turn to others for literature searching. Librarians typically market their services but do we really “sell” them? We need to put ourselves in a position to sell, to show how information can be put into context, looking for “teachable moments”, stressing teamwork, collaboration. Setting up current awareness services for clients was also mentioned as a supplementary method of assisting users.

The conversation turned to some suggestions for useful resources beyond PUBMED. Using current textbooks for basic overviews of a topic as opposed to searching the journal literature, which tends to be too narrowly defined for the neophyte to a field was mentioned. Also, the usefulness of cross-database searching in services such as DIALOG was discussed, along with appropriate times to use EMBASE and BIOSIS.

The roundtable concluded with sharing definitions of “expert searching”:

1. Experienced use of technology in a complex environment.

2. Skills learned over time for providing information in a timely manner which meet specific goals.
3. Way of looking at information: “growing pearls”.
4. Not really definable – too subjective a term.
5. Reference: to MLA definition – trained intermediary.
6. .Communicating a broader, multidisciplinary perspective.
7. Someone with methodological training and experience.
8. An “X Factor” which brings forth useful information.
9. Search analyst embedded in a clinical setting.