



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

## **Table 13C: Informationists**

**Facilitator:** Marcus Banks

**Recorder:** Francesca Allegri

### **Participants**

Gillian is a new informationist fellow, funded by NLM, at Michigan in public health. She has an undergraduate degree in philosophy, is a librarian, and is taking public health courses.

Betty is working with a community-based hospital that, due to recent closure, no longer had a librarian. Needed someone to work with preceptors and medical school faculty.

Marcus' title is Informationist at NYAM. His focus is bioterrorism and natural disasters and working with those practitioners to understand how they operate and what information services they need.

Leslie is at CDC, which has at least one informationist fellow; is interested in becoming an informationist. Her background is engineering. Informationist fellow at CDC has nursing background and an MPH. Has developed a laptop based application for first responder and is assessing gaps in information needs; analyzing how to better serve needs. He is a panelist at this MLA meeting.

Linda, from Emory, whose main teaching hospital started a CML program around 1980. She was there at the time of the informationist conference sponsored by NLM.

Diane is chair of the MLA task force on the information specialist in context. She is a hospital librarian. This group was underrepresented at the NLM conference. Need to understand and acknowledge threat perception and misunderstandings of the implications of informationist concept.

### **Topics**

#### **What's in a name**

Informationist word modeled after hospitalist, etc terminology in clinical setting  
Felt by some to be too narrow (too clinical), negative, exclusionary  
Many health sciences librarians do not have science background, is threatening  
Discussion by MLA board resulted in ISIC: information specialist in context

One view is that this terminology and concept were presented by Davidoff and Florance to prompt us to look at our work differently, shake up our thinking, i.e., not a blueprint

The informationist concept is in very early states, NIH has informationists with subject degrees, however, experience might be equivalent; still at stage where don't know if there will be jobs; probably it's only one job of many, just like clinical pharmacists

Should consider the informationist and information specialist in context not as a debate, or death of CML but as an evolution/revolution of roles – part of a continuum of services that we need to look at; the drawback of Florance's editorial is that it was posing an alternative vs. a complementary service

### **What distinguishes an informationist**

Level of subject expertise

Level of critical appraisal of the literature – going further to synthesize and integrate

Level of being in context – integrated in the culture, significant time spent in the patrons' environment (virtually and physically)

Level of responsibility – enough to raise liability questions

Comments about these distinctions:

How much more education would I need? Unknown, fellowships may help us find out

Some faculty want the residents to synthesize, take it a step further, i.e., don't want librarian to digest it too much, only find good stuff for the students to hash

Special librarians are similar in synthesizing and providing answers

Vanderbilt has a program to educate the librarians in the subject area; most libraries would not have that capability

Some with CML programs feel have to have faculty or chief resident to work with you, they are a critical ingredient, when personnel change can impact program, which is frustrating

To make these programs successful, faculty need to be teachers and educators themselves

Clinical pharmacist parallels

Diane's CML program in family medicine has 3 librarians going to 3 departments

Fellow reports is good place to go, best payoff with the 72-hour reports

Blanket statements about success factors difficult to make

Educating clinicians is a component of CML – in hospital more likely to want the answer, do search for them is what they are used to; to education have begun posting user-friendly version of search strategy and results to the intranet as educational follow-up, show them how to google more effectively

In public health doing program evaluations, finding statistics

In some public health settings, you won't have credibility without an MPH; in almost any capacity min requirement is MPH unless you work in lab

One comment is that CML work “is the most fun thing I do – I learn so much, better at collection development and other services...to be able to do a case presentation, be a part of the culture...”  
Felt that residents have high expectations for library services when they leave the institution

### **Future considerations**

Getting institutions to support informationists, if this concept proves to be a good thing, is a challenge; it took clinical pharmacists a long time to be accepted, not reimbursed either

Will we see enough benefit? Need research to show this work improves patient care or saves money – save money by reducing error, improved patient safety – long way down the road; malpractice cases ask for literature

We need to get articles out into the professional literature – Annals, etc on this concept  
FPIN Family Practice Inquiries Network librarians as co-authors is the partnership style that can be very effective

### **Reports on informationist/information specialist in context**

At this MLA meeting, Guise and the consultant team will, at the business meeting, present an interim report on the survey they conducted; there will be a joint session reaction to the survey, and a task force open forum panel with people speaking who are working in informationist roles

From preliminary results of task force, could anticipate MLA CE to take on some responsibility for preparation

Beginning to think post-masters specialization (clinical, etc) could evolve, maybe as a distance learning option; tailored to first job