

# Medical Librarianship

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## Enjoy working with people? Working with computers? Solving puzzles? Bringing order to chaos? Making a difference in people's lives?

If so, pursuing a career in medical librarianship might be the choice for you. Medical librarians work in exciting places like hospitals; universities with medical, nursing, and other health occupations programs; government agencies; or Internet companies. You can find medical librarians working in companies that do medical or drug research, publish, or provide health insurance. Medical librarians work anywhere people need health-related information.

Medical librarianship is a service profession. Medical librarians, sometimes called health information specialists, get information about medical treatments, research, procedures, tests, and equipment for health occupations workers, patients, consumers, and corporations. They help health occupations workers provide quality care to patients, help patients find information, and provide information to health care industries.

*Medical librarians are people who are good at:*

- listening and understanding someone's question, so that person gets a good answer
- using computers, computer gadgets, and the Internet
- making Websites
- being curious and always wanting to learn more
- solving problems creatively
- organizing materials and ideas to make them easier for others to use
- sharing knowledge and teaching people one at a time or in small groups
- learning new technologies and new ways to find information
- thinking about what makes an information source good or bad

## Education

Librarians have bachelor's degrees in many subjects. They also must have a master's degree, usually in library and information science, from a graduate school accredited by the American Library

Association ([http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Our\\_Association/Offices/Accreditation1/lisdir/LIS\\_Directory.htm](http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Our_Association/Offices/Accreditation1/lisdir/LIS_Directory.htm)). Bachelor's degrees in sciences or computers can help but are not required to be a medical librarian. Courses in biology, medical sciences, medical terminology, computer science, education, and management are useful.

Some graduate schools of library and information science offer students courses in medical librarianship (<http://www.mlanet.org/education/libschools/index.html>). Even without having taken health sciences classes in graduate school, you can work as a medical librarian. At some schools, you can do an internship at a medical library for credit. The Medical Library Association also offers a series of short continuing education classes that prepare librarians for working in medical libraries.

## Working Environment

Medical librarians usually have offices. Medical libraries can be in a single office or a huge building. Some medical librarians work with small collections and get documents from other libraries or commercial suppliers.

Medical librarians work with doctors, nurses, medical students, physical therapists, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, hospital administrators, and other health care workers. These coworkers are educated and want to see their patients receive the best possible treatment. Medical librarians often work with information technology specialists, because so much information is available through computers. Many medical librarians also help patients and their families at universities, hospitals, clinics, and government agencies.

Medical librarians have to be comfortable with computers and new technology. In large libraries, some medical librarians work directly with those who use the library's services, and others like to work behind the scenes. You can choose the kind of medical librarian job you find most interesting.

## Kinds of Medical Librarian Jobs

- Web manager for a health sciences university library
- community outreach coordinator for a public health agency
- reference librarian at a hospital or academic medical center

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- electronic resource cataloger for an Internet company
- director of a veterinary school library
- education specialist at a consumer health library
- information architect for a drug manufacturing company
- chief information officer for a hospital
- many more

## Salary

Salaries for medical librarians depend on the kind of library, the location of the library, the amount of

responsibility, and the librarian's experience. The Medical Library Association reports, in 2001, according to a Hay Survey, the average salary for a medical librarian with less than two years of experience was about \$40,000. The overall average salary for medical librarians in 2001 was \$49,955. Library directors at health sciences universities can earn up to \$125,000. According to the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries, AAHSL's 2001-2002 Annual Statistics of Medical School Libraries in the United States and Canada, the highest paid directors in academic health sciences libraries earned up to \$193,000.

## Making a Difference: A True Story

My phone rang. The doctor in charge of caring for children (pediatrics) called for help. He had an eighteen-month-old baby in the intensive care unit. Medical tests showed the baby had a stomach ulcer bleeding uncontrollably. The doctor knew how to treat an adult with a bleeding ulcer but had never seen a baby with this problem. He could not give the baby medicines he would give an adult. He needed to find a drug to give the baby, and so he called me, the medical librarian. Without treatment, this baby was going to die.

I sat at my computer, connected to MEDLINE (<http://pubmed.gov>), an online database of medical articles. I searched for magazine articles about uncontrolled bleeding, stomach ulcers, and drug therapy. I used the commands I knew to limit the search to articles written in English about a baby less than two years old. Few people had studied this problem, and fewer than ten articles had been written on the subject in forty years. I called the baby's doctor and told him what I found. I chose some of the articles listed in MEDLINE and quickly photocopied them. Next, I rushed them to the pediatric intensive care unit. The baby survived, because the doctor used a drug he read about in the articles I found. I was scared and excited to know that my work had saved a life. Medical librarians do not always know how people use the information they find.

They do know they make a difference in real people's lives. It is an exciting career!

## Explore a Career as a Medical Librarian

Find a mentor online to discuss a career as medical librarian, look up tip sheets to explore medical librarianship, or download the brochure: Medical Librarianship:

A Career that Surfs the Net, at:

[http://www.mlanet.org/career/career\\_explore.html](http://www.mlanet.org/career/career_explore.html)