

# Health information for the global village

The Washington Hilton and Towers was the meeting place for 3 800 medical librarians from around the world between 7-12 May 1995. The occasion was the 95th annual meeting of the Medical Library Association (MLA) and the 7th International congress of Medical librarianship (ICML).

The theme of both the conferences was how medical librarians need to develop skills in using traditional professional expertise in non-traditional ways and in unconventional and new settings.

## Programming solution for school libraries

Waraburra State School in Central Queensland has had a computerised library since 1992. Unremarkable, except for the fact that the software they are using was written especially for the school by one of its staff, Tony Trost, Waraburra's key teacher in technology at that time.

The first major part of any programming effort is to ascertain what tasks the program must perform and what information it will offer the user. This information was gained with the assistance of the teacher librarian.

A large chunk of programming time was spent in getting the data entry, editing, borrowing and return modules just right. This would be the bulk of the computer's job.

To get the library administration system up and running quickly only the title, author, call number, item description and accession date were entered. Later Programming effort was devoted to making subject heading entries far more efficient.

Student information consisted of number, name, class and items out. Later a figure was added to keep track of the number of items borrowed for the year.

By mid 1993 the program was saving about 10 hours of library administration work per week. It was time to add a few accessories and pretty up the screens.

Daniel R Masys MD, Director of biomedical informatics at the School of Medicine of the University of California, in his lecture entitled *The informatics of health care reform*, encouraged us to promote Internet use in our institutions, to raise the level of communication between patients and doctors and to raise the market visibility of our services by developing a home page on the World Wide Web.

The twenty-three sections of MLA reflect the diversity of medical librarians in the United States and concur-

rent sessions relating to these sections were held during the conference.

As a librarian with a long-standing interest in consumer health information, it was heartening to realise the strength of this movement in the United States. In addition to frequent references to the concept in several keynote addresses, the continuing education one-day course on consumer health information was well attended.

The other hot topic was the Internet, but the technical hype was counterbalanced by input from librarians from other parts of the world who reminded us of the limited resources available to them; that in order to live effectively we need to be able to use information; that in many countries the flow of information is controlled as a means of exerting power; and that even such organisations as the World Health Organization can implement information policies which reflect a strong gender bias.

About ten health librarians from Australia attended the conferences and papers were presented during ICML by Prue Deacon (on behalf of John Holgate) of the ACT and June Rider Jones of WA. Prue reported on the development of the HealthROM resource and June reminded us that even today, when information is supposedly freely available, forces can be exerted to delay or prevent the publication of controversial information.

In addition to providing us with much professional development, the conference provided an ideal opportunity to network with a wide variety of colleagues.

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