

US Medical Library Association report for EAHIL



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Adapting | Transforming | Leading
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Conference report. MLA '18: Atlanta, Georgia 18-23 May 2018

This year the US Medical Library Association (MLA) conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia. This is the first time that MLA has been held in Atlanta; indeed the first time even in Georgia, since they began in 1898! As I said in my previous column prior to MLA, the symbol of the rising phoenix in the meeting logo reflects Atlanta's official seal and celebrates the city's rise from the ashes of the Civil War to become the 21st century "capital city of the Southeast" with its rich history and diversity. Diversity was certainly a strong theme during the meeting as I shall outline below.

Those of you who read my report of the 2015 MLA conference in Austin, Texas, may recollect my mentioning major thunderstorms during the conference which went some way to alleviating the drought which had persisted in Texas since 2008. You may also remember that for Mosaic '16 in Toronto it snowed (yes, snow in May), having been warm and sunny a few days earlier and this year in Atlanta there were thunderstorms all week! A colleague and I had planned to go to the local baseball game (the Atlanta Braves versus the Chicago Cubs) to soak up some local atmosphere but the weather put us off and when we checked the web site later that evening we saw crowds huddled under rain capes still waiting for the game to start! We did, however, manage to go on a trolley bus tour and see the heritage area associated with Martin Luther King, who had been born in Atlanta almost 90 years ago and had preached there until his untimely death – and we passed quickly by the Coca Cola museum (Cola was invented in Atlanta, apparently).

The conference started, as ever, with a wide range of Continuing Education courses on the Friday and Saturday. This year there were 19 CE courses with 237 participants. As usual, a colleague and I presented two courses, which regrettably meant that I was not able to attend anyone else's courses, so cannot comment further on those! Many of the courses were very popular and some sold out very quickly. Courses were grouped into 'suites' allowing delegates to select complementary courses including consumer health information, data management, evidence-based practice, expert searcher and management.

At the conference itself, there were c. 1,800 delegates from 23 countries. There were 80 delegates from outside the US / Canada, 38 of whom were from 6 European countries. Approximately 140 papers (including c. 65 lightning talks) and c. 170 posters were presented. First-time speakers were flagged in the programme with a "New Voices" logo. As ever, the conference was supported by an exhibition with about 80 exhibiting companies. At the opening plenary, Kevin Baliozian, the MLA Executive Director, acknowledged all the meeting sponsors and invited the top four (Gold level) sponsors (ClinicalKey, EBSCO, McGraw-Hill and Wolters Kluwer) to the stage to make a brief presentation, the most memorable of whom

had to be Greg St Louis from Wolters Kluwer, who wore a fascinator in honour of the Royal Wedding in the UK that weekend! Kevin reminded us of the essential role that sponsors play in supporting the annual meeting and commented that 59% of the cost of running the meeting had come from sponsorship, exhibitors etc.; the rest (i.e. 41%) came from our registration fees; a fact that we would all do well to remember for EAHIL and other such events.

Kevin was followed by Barbara Epstein, 2017/2018 MLA President. She began her President's report by referring to her attendance at "ICML + EAHIL" in Dublin last year and saying how useful she had found it, how welcome she had felt and the high regard she had experienced for MLA and services from the US National Library of Medicine (NLM).

The conference theme this year was "Adapting Transforming Leading" but much of the focus, especially in the plenaries, was around diversity and equity. Beverly Murphy, 2018/2019 MLA President, was introduced into office as the first African American President of MLA.

The key opening plenary speaker (the Annual John P. McGovern Award Lecture), which recognizes significant national or international figures who speak on a topic of importance to health sciences librarianship, was William Powers. He is author of the New York Times bestseller *Hamlet's BlackBerry: Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*, widely praised for its insights on the digital future. It has been published in many countries and languages. He is currently a research scientist at the Laboratory of Social Machines at the MIT Media Lab, where he is developing new technologies for journalism, governance, and the public sphere. He is also a former Washington Post journalist. He opened his presentation with a photograph of the library in Trinity College Dublin. He spoke about his work and private life, including sharing with us his idea for an Internet Sabbath which he and his family had undertaken from 2007 to 2012 where, each weekend, from Friday evening to Monday morning, they existed, as a family, with no internet! Quite a challenge with a six-year-old son!
<https://www.williampowers.com/>

Dara Richardson-Heron delivered another of the plenary sessions. She is chief engagement officer of the "All of Us" research programme at the (US) National Institutes of Health (NIH). "All of Us" aims to build one of the largest biomedical data sets in the world, involving participants from diverse communities across the US. She is leading outreach efforts to enrol and retain one million or more volunteers in this landmark effort to advance innovative health research that may lead to more precise treatments and prevention strategies. She spoke about the programme, launched on 6th May 2018, their hopes for its success and some of the challenges ahead.

<https://www.nih.gov/research-training/allofus-research-program/dara-richardson-heron-md-named-chief-engagement-officer-all-us-research-program>

The closing keynote, another excellent presentation, was by David Satcher. He is a physician-scientist and public health administrator with an extensive track record of leadership, research, and community engagement. He is the founding director and senior advisor for the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at the Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, Georgia. He has served as surgeon general of the US (the second African American to be appointed to this role), assistant secretary for health in the Department of Health & Human Services, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta and administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). He has an interest in inequalities in health. He opened his presentation by telling us that his first job, as a medical student, had been in the library, preparing journals for binding. He spoke about disparities in health, equality versus equity and reminded us that our zip (postal) code is a better predictor of health than our genetic code.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Satcher

Patricia Brennan, Director of NLM, opened the annual NLM Update. She has been in post for about one year and is the first woman and the first non-medical doctor to hold this prestigious position (she trained as a nurse).

All the above plenaries are available as part of the e-Conference package, see below.

I regret that I was so busy again with my own commitments this year that I did not have a chance to visit the NLM booth, which usually has a vast range of presentations on NLM and related products and services, many of which rank highly in quality and relevance compared with the oral sessions in the main programme. All presentations are recorded and are already available on the NLM Web site:

https://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/mj18/mj18_mla_theater_presentations.html

A Health Information for Public Librarians Symposium was held in parallel during the last 1.5 days of the MLA conference. MLA delegates were able to attend the symposium as part of their registration for the MLA '18 annual meeting. The symposium, of interest to both public librarians as well as medical and health care librarians, offered programming in the area of health information for the public. It also provided an opportunity for public and medical and health care librarians to network.

The “e-conference” registration is still available post-conference. The cost for “Individual e-Conference Registration” is 129 USD. Please note that this is an individual rate, not to be shared with your colleagues. If you wish to obtain an “e-conference” site licence for more than one person, please see the link below. Once you have registered for the “e-Conference”, you can listen to recordings and follow the slides of the plenary and parallel sessions as well as the oral sessions and other content.

<http://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=1439>

This was, as always, a very successful, well-organized and enjoyable meeting and thank you to all MLA staff, the Meeting Co-Chairs, the National Program Committee, the Local Assistance Committee, exhibitors and sponsors, presenters and others who made it such a success.

I should like to close with some (for me, at least) memorable quotations from various speakers at the meeting:

Patricia Brennan: *“The people who know us love us but what about the people who do not know us? ... What happens in Bethesda does NOT stay in Bethesda!”*

Beverly Murphy: *“If Chef Ramsay were coming to your house, would you cook?!”*

William Powers: *“We are recognizing that not everything is on Google - but you already knew that!”*

William Powers: *“Technology is neither good nor bad: nor is it neutral.”* The first Kranzberg rule of technology.

William Powers: *“I’m not worried about artificial intelligence giving computers the ability to think like humans, I’m more concerned about people thinking like computers, without values or compassion, without concern for consequence.”* Tim Cook, CEO, Apple.

Dara Richardson-Heron: The “All of Us” research programme is *“among the most ambitious research efforts”* ever undertaken. Francis Collins, Director, NIH.

Future MLA annual meetings - dates for your diary:

Chicago, Illinois, 3-8 May 2019

Portland, Oregon, 15-20 May 2020

Washington, DC, 21-26 May 2021