

National Library of Medicine report for EAHIL



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Greetings. I thought it would be appropriate to begin this inaugural News Update with a brief overview of the US National Library of Medicine (NLM). With this piece, I'm giving you a "big picture" view of the Library, but you are welcome and encouraged to delve deeper into the history and complete resources available at the NLM Web site (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>).

The NLM has been a center of information innovation since its founding in 1836 as the Library of the Surgeon General of the Army. The world's largest biomedical library, the NLM maintains and makes available a vast collection, from 11th century manuscripts to current electronic journals, and produces electronic information resources on a wide range of topics that are searched billions of times each year by millions of people around the globe.

The Library is composed of several divisions and offices, each of which plays a unique role in carrying out the activities in the NLM portfolio. Library Operations (LO) is responsible for the services that ensure access to the published record of biomedical science, creating and disseminating bibliographic data, and promotes public awareness of health information. NLM has two organizations that conduct advanced R&D on different aspects of biomedical communication, the Lister Hill National Center for Biomedical Communications (LHNBC) and the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). NCBI produces PubMed for accessing references and abstracts and PubMed Central (PMC) for full text articles on life sciences and biomedical topics. An Extramural Programs Division (EP) administers extramural grant programs related to biomedical informatics and the management and dissemination of biomedical knowledge. The Office of Computer and Communications Systems (OCCS) provides efficient, computing and networking services, application development, and technical advice and collaboration in informational sciences. The Division of Specialized Information Services (SIS) develops a diverse collection of resources in toxicology, environmental health, chemistry, HIV/AIDS, health-related disaster management, minority health, and other specialized topics. The Office of Health Information Programs Development (OHIPD) plans and evaluates nationwide and international outreach and consumer health programs to improve access to NLM information services.

Together these divisions work to make NLM's advanced information systems disseminate an enormous range of information, including: genetic, genomic, chemical, toxicology, and clinical research data; images; published and unpublished research results; decision support resources; standards for scientific and health data and publications; informatics tools for system developers; and high quality health information for the public.

Globally, scientists, health professionals and the public can search or download information directly from any NLM Web resource, find it via an Internet search engine, or use apps that provide value-added access to NLM data. Thousands of commercial and non-profit system developers regularly use the applications programming interfaces (APIs) that NLM provides to fuel private sector innovation.

Although research and development is a cornerstone of NLM, the Library is also recognized for its outstanding work in outreach to underserved health professionals and in consumer health. A 6,300-member National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) serves as a vehicle for providing training for librarians and other information professionals in advanced use of NLM products and services and in many other topics, including the NIH public access policy, library support for disaster preparedness and response, data management, health service research, and public health. NLM's flagship consumer-friendly database, MedlinePlus.gov, has extensive information from the National Institutes of Health and other trusted sources on over 950 diseases and conditions, health information in Spanish and nearly 45 other languages, extensive information on prescription and nonprescription drugs, and links to thousands of clinical trials. Other consumer-focused sites include AIDSinfo, ClinicalTrials.gov, Genetics Home Reference, and ToxTown.

I wish I could share the entire NLM story in this first installment, but I will look forward to sharing more news on these and other programs and resources in future issues.

I want to share one last piece of news. NLM will soon be losing its Director, Donald A.B. Lindberg, after more than 30 years at the helm. While the leadership may change, the NLM will continue the thread – genomic data, standardized electronic health records, natural language understanding applied to clinical text and published knowledge, low-cost parallel processing, a prized print collection, and a world-class suite of electronic databases and mobile platforms – to make reliable health and medical information available when and where it is needed, free of charge, in the proper format, to persons around the globe, for the benefit of the public health. I promise to keep you posted, as we enter a new era.

Until then, I encourage you to try one of my weekly indulgences, the Circulating Now (<http://circulatingnow.nlm.nih.gov/>) blog, which brings NLM's historical collections to life in a fun and exciting way.