

US Medical Library Association report for EAHIL



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Conference report. **MLA '19: Chicago, Illinois 3-8 May 2019.**

This year the US Medical Library Association (MLA) conference was held in Chicago, Illinois. Last year it had been held in Atlanta, Georgia, for the first time since MLA began their annual meetings in 1898! The same cannot be said of Chicago; this was the 10th annual meeting to be held in Chicago (the city of MLA headquarters) and the 4th which I have attended. Chicago also happens to be my favourite US city; not only is it a very beautiful city from an architectural perspective but it was also the first US city I ever visited (33 years ago) to visit my parents-in-law who lived nearby, so perhaps there is an element of nostalgia there too.

The word ELEVATE in the logo is a reference to the Chicago "L" (short for "elevated"), which is the name given to the rapid transit system serving the city of Chicago and its suburbs. It has been running trains since 1892, 6 years before MLA held their first annual meeting, in 1898 in Philadelphia.

As usual, the weather was 'turbulent' in the time around MLA. Those of you who read these reports may recollect my mentioning major thunderstorms during the 2015 MLA conference in Austin, Texas, 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. I have no recollection of the weather in 2017 in Seattle – but in 2018 in Atlanta there were thunderstorms all week! This year, during the weekend before MLA, it snowed in Chicago (c. 6 cm) with c. 15 cm in other parts of the state outside the city.

The conference started, as ever, with a wide range of Continuing Education courses on the Friday and Saturday. This year there were 16 CE courses together with one CE Symposium with a total of 227 CE 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 labelled according to MLA's new 7 areas of practice, allowing delegates to select complementary courses including clinical support, education, global health & health equity, information services, innovation & research practice and professionalism & leadership. (There were none offered in the seventh area of practice: information management.)

At the conference itself, there were c. 1,000 delegates plus c. 500 exhibitor attendees from 19 countries.

There were c. 90 delegates from outside the US, 36 of whom were from 5 European countries (27 of whom were from the UK).

Approximately 100 papers (plus c. 50 'lightning talks') and c. 170 posters were presented. There were also c. 20 80-minute 'immersion sessions' (formerly called 'special content sessions'). These were described as follows: "Immersion Sessions are the new Special Content Sessions and are meant to provide an in-depth perspective on areas of interest to MLA members. They are your chance to design and offer the programming that you want to see. Immersion Sessions should strive for excellent engagement and can vary in format, ranging from a panel of invited speakers to a single invited speaker, a facilitated book discussion, as well as less-conventional sessions like an "unconference" or flipped session. The only type of programming excluded from Immersion Sessions are paper presentations." So, please do consider this new format if you are thinking of presenting at MLA in future years. First-time speakers were again this year flagged in the programme with a 'New Voices' logo.

As ever, the conference was supported by an exhibition and by direct sponsorship. There were c. 80 exhibiting companies and the top sponsors of this year's event were ClinicalKey, EBSCO Health, The JAMA Network, McGraw Hill, the NEJM Group and Wolters Kluwer. As well as hiring booth space in the exhibition hall and direct sponsorship, exhibitors had the opportunity to offer Sunrise Seminars, Technology Showcase sessions and the popular Lunch and Learn slots, which MLA had introduced last year in Seattle. The Lunch and Learn slots are very similar to the Sunrise Seminars except at a more civilized time of day, as the name suggests!

The US National Library of Medicine (NLM) held their usual NLM Update as a plenary session but this year moved away from their traditional 'in booth' presentations in the exhibition hall to informal discussions with experts for each of their products scheduled for specific times. For me, this was disappointing as I often found their 'in booth' presentations to be more informative and of a higher standard than some of the parallel oral sessions. Let's see what they plan for next year!

Due to other conference commitments, I regrettably missed the opening ceremony, consisting of the official welcomes and the presidential address, given by Beverly Murphy, 2018 / 2019 MLA President, who I mentioned in a previous MLA report for JEAHIL, is the first African American President of MLA.

It was apt then that the Janet Doe Lecture was delivered by Jerry Perry, under the title: "The Activist Health Sciences Librarian". He gave a very moving address around the topic of social justice / injustice. He talked about the extent of institutional racial discrimination in US libraries decades ago and also about his own more recent personal struggle in overcoming homophobic discrimination in the workplace.

The Joseph Leiter NLM / MLA Lecturer was Nadya Okamoto, who was described in the programme as: "Social Entrepreneur, Activist and Founder and Executive Director of PERIOD: The Menstrual Movement". She again, like Jerry Peery above, addressed social injustice, in this case the discrimination against women in some countries where they are not allowed to work or handle food during their period. She also talked about period poverty and the benefits of providing free sanitary products and the removal of tax from tampons. At the age of 19, she had stood for election for Cambridge City Council (Cambridge, Massachusetts, that is), whilst a first year student at Harvard. She mentioned in her presentation that she had been the youngest Asian American to run for office in the US. She was a most inspiring speaker, even though her view of Facebook is that it is totally passé. She referred to it as something that her grandmother might use!

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The closing keynote, another very interesting presentation, was by Katherine L Watson. She is an academic, who trained originally as a lawyer, and a bioethicist. She currently teaches law, ethics and humanities to medical students and students of bioethics and medical humanities at Northwestern University in Chicago. She also has a background in theatre and is a playwright and an actor. Her presentation was about medical improvization, which she referred to as “medical improv” and described it as improvizational theatre and discussed its role in medical education. She talked about a programme she had developed nearly 20 years ago to use medical improvization to improve doctor-patient communication. For those wishing to benefit from the audience participation elements of this presentation, please refer to details below about access to the plenary sessions!

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

The ‘e-conference’ registration is still available post-conference. The cost for individual e-conference registration is 129 USD. Further details are at the link below. Please note that this is an individual rate, not to be shared with your colleagues. If you wish to obtain an ‘Institutional e-Conference licence’ for up to 25 colleagues, please also see the link below. These licences permit access for one year (until May 2020). You can view videos of all Plenary Sessions and PowerPoint slides with synchronized audio for all available Immersion and Paper Sessions. In addition, you can access 150 posters in the Online Poster Gallery.

<https://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=1433>

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, the professional meeting organizers and others who made it such a success.

The next MLA annual meeting will be the 120th, so all the more reason to plan to attend!

Some quotations from the meeting:

“To improve is to change, so to be perfect is to have changed often.” Winston Churchill (June 23, 1925), quoted by Kevin Baliozian, Executive Director of MLA.

“Menstrual hygiene is not a luxury, it is a human right.” Nadya Okamoto, plenary speaker.

“Stage-appropriate stupid” (i.e. there are stages in learning. Medical students are at medical school to learn. It is OK not to know and it is not stupid to ask questions!). Katherine L Watson, plenary speaker.

Future MLA annual meetings - dates for your diary:

Portland, Oregon, 15-20 May 2020

Washington, DC, 21-26 May 2021

New Orleans, Louisiana, 2-7 May 2022