



Update from the National Library of Medicine

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As you may recall from previous issues, we have many changes happening in our Library as a result of the 2017-27 NLM Strategic Plan. In this issue, I thought I would share a couple of changes to key personnel in two of our major divisions, Library Operations and the National Center for Biotechnology Information.



Joyce Backus retired as Associate Director for Library Operations on February 28, 2020. Ms. Backus arrived at NLM as a graduate student in October of 1983 and, except for a brief policy position with the American Library Association Washington Office in 1985, served her entire career at NLM. A variety of positions allowed her to explore and capitalize on her interests in measuring user behavior, product ownership, workforce management and organizational leadership. She has served as the Associate Director since 2012 and before that, served in positions that included the Deputy Associate Director for LO, the Deputy Chief of the Public Services Division, and Head of the Reference and Web Services Section, among others. Ms. Backus is the

executive secretary to the federal advisory committee recommending journals for MEDLINE (Literature Selection Technical Review Committee or LSTRC) and has represented NLM to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, the Association of Research Libraries, and the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries. She has an AB degree in sociology and English from Duke University and an MLS from The Catholica University of America.



Dianne Babski has been selected to serve as the Acting Associate Director for Library Operations (LO) following the retirement of Joyce Backus on February 28, 2020. As Acting Associate Director of LO, Ms. Babski is responsible for the budget, facilities, administration, and overall management of one of NLM's largest divisions. She is responsible for more than 450 staff who provide health information services to a global audience of health care professionals, researchers, administrators, students, historians, patients, and the public. In her acting role, Ms. Babski oversees a national network of over 8,000 academic health science libraries, hospital and public libraries, and community organizations to improve access to health information. Ms. Babski will

also serve as the Scientific Review Administrator to the federal advisory committee recommending journals for MEDLINE (Literature Selection Technical Review Committee) and will represent NLM to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors and the Association of Research Libraries. Ms. Babski has served as the Deputy Associate Director for LO since April 2013. As Deputy, she led the inaugural year for the Data Science @NLM Training Program for NLM staff, served as acting head of the Coordinating Office of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, and Acting Head of the National Information Center on Health Services Research & Health Care Technology. Prior to joining NLM in 2005, Ms. Babski worked in the Scientific Review Program of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, developing peer review tools and database resources. She also worked on the NASA SPACELINE data

project that supplied space life sciences citations and indexing to MEDLINE. She has a BS and MIM from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Dr. James Ostell will retire from federal service on March 31, 2020. He earned a Ph.D. in molecular biology at Harvard University, then established a successful commercial software package for molecular biologists, before he was recruited to NLM at the creation of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) in 1988. At the time NCBI consisted of 12 people, DNA sequencing was a slow, manual process, the public internet did not exist, data CDROM was a recent invention, and NCBI had no resource portfolio. Dr. Ostell created and led the group building production resources that became IEB, and which today runs the most consistently heavily used website in the federal government serving more than 5 million users a day at rates of 7000 web hits a second. He was actively involved in creating and managing resources which today are foundations of biomedical research and practice, including PubMed, PubMed Central, GenBank, RefSeq, GEO, dbGaP, dbSNP, ClinVar, Genetic Testing Registry, SRA, and BLAST among others. NCBI has grown to more than 700 staff, and Dr. Ostell has also managed several changes in organization and management to adjust to the changing scale and demands on the organization. In 2007 Dr. Ostell was inducted into the National Academies Institute of Medicine and made an NIH Distinguished Investigator in 2011. He became Director of NCBI in 2017.



Dr. Stephen Sherry will be the Acting Director of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) on April 1, 2020. Dr. Sherry currently is the Deputy Director of the Data Services Division within NCBI's Information Engineering Branch, which is responsible for developing and operating all NCBI production services, with program areas spanning literature, sequences, chemistry, clinical research, and medical genetics. He earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology at the Pennsylvania State University in 1996, and post-doc'd at the Louisiana State University Medical Center until joining NCBI in 1998. Dr. Sherry leads an NCBI program to migrate NCBI's largest resource, the Sequence Read Archive, into the cloud with the transfer and management of petabyte-scale sequence data onto Amazon and Google clouds. He conducts research on the architecture of population genetic information to ensure NCBI human genetic information systems are both useful to researchers and respectful to the privacy of study participants.

We will miss Joyce and Jim and are appreciative for their many years of dedicated service to the Library. Steve and I have large shoes to fill but will put our best foot forward to continue their work and leadership in our respective Divisions.