

# Update from the National Library of Medicine



**Dianne Babski**

Associate Director, Library Operations  
National Library of Medicine  
National Institutes of Health  
Department of Health and Human Services  
dianne.babski@nih.gov  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>

Greetings from Lake Gaston in North Carolina! I'm writing this update while sitting on a dock, enjoying the last show of Fall colors while taking a break from my home and home office in Maryland. Like many of you, it's been an interesting year and I find it hard to believe it has been eight months since we started working fully remote during a global pandemic.

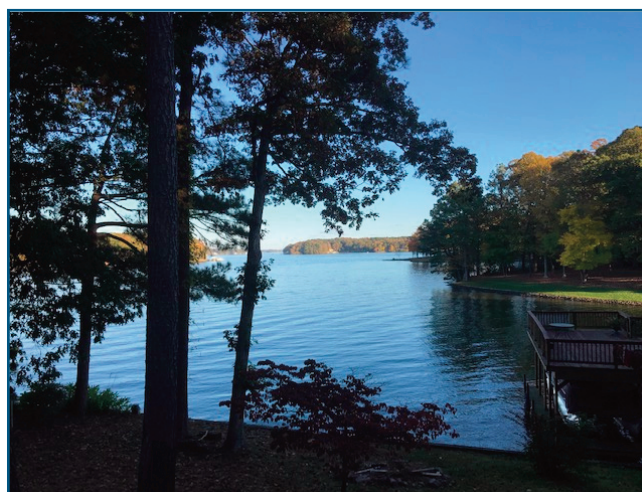
I want to acknowledge that the National Library of Medicine (NLM) is as much about people as it is a place where we do business. While the way we do business has changed because of the pandemic, we've done our best to be flexible and responsive. We have adapted our work to be done offsite so we can keep our staff safe while keeping critical operations going. I, along with other NLM leadership, am very proud of how our people have risen to this challenge!

For the [NLM update at the Annual Medical Library Association's Virtual Meeting](#) in August, we described the current state of NLM according to three themes: Resilience, Relevance and Reinvention. These themes have now become our guiding principles as we continue to work and lead in these extraordinary times.

### RESILIENCE

Let's first look at resilience in action over the last eight months. Since we went to maximum telework the way we work has had to change. Many of our staff who typically work with our collections have embraced new work, like transcribing manuscripts or working on data projects. All communications, meetings, and even conferences have gone virtual – and everyone had to quickly adapt to a variety of new online technology and platforms. I myself even created a series of “virtual walk-about” to simulate my usual walking around the office to check in with staff.

As you know, data standards are essential to the exchange of health information for research and clinical care. We swiftly updated our coding and terminology products, like [MeSH](#), with new COVID-related entries. We've updated our standards products like the Common Data Elements Repository (CDE) with [protocol questionnaires](#). This standardized, quick response enables easy and open access to research that matters for increasing discovery and solving the pandemic.



Understanding insights from our historical collections better positions us to solve the current challenges we face. Our History of Medicine Division staff quickly adapted to the COVID response challenge by showcasing relevant information on past pandemics including the 1918 Spanish Flu Work, Circulating Now blog articles, lecture series, and history talks. Through our [global health event web archiving](#) activities, we are capturing and preserving selected web content covering this coronavirus pandemic.

We opened PubMed Central (PMC), our digital archive of peer-reviewed biomedical and life sciences journal literature, to expand access to full-text articles related to coronavirus. Recognizing the growing demand from the research and library communities in preprints, we launched the [NIH Preprint Pilot](#) to make preprints searchable in PMC and discoverable in PubMed, starting with COVID-19 preprints reporting NIH-supported research. Preprints are complete, public drafts of scientific documents that are not yet peer reviewed. They play a key role in accelerating the dissemination of research on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19. To make access to articles faster, we adapted our procedures for depositing articles and continue to engage with publishers whose journals are within the scope of the Library's collection.

### RELEVANCE

Let's explore our second guiding principle: relevance. [Our Strategic Plan](#) lays the foundation for NLM's future; Goal three is to inspire and empower the data-driven workforce needed to meet the demands of tomorrow. This year, we were fortunate to have the opportunity to recruit and hire 20 recent graduates in a government-wide Pathways program that encourages students to enter federal public service. All staff were recruited, selected and onboarded virtually during the pandemic. For the first time at NLM, or at least during my 15 years at NLM, we were able to successfully – and safely – onboard all individuals while in a remote work mode without having to set foot in the building.

Last year, NLM began a Data Science @ NLM Training Program which has been instrumental in building a data savvy workforce. We were able to assess the developmental needs of over 1,200 employees and lay the foundation for learning and skill building through a variety of training events and activities, including an [Open House](#) where staff shared data science projects and contributed ideas for enhancing our products. It was a highlight of my career at NLM to see staff across all job series and divisions come together to learn, share and inspire.

Because we are committed to workforce development, this was not a “one and done” effort. This year, we initiated more training and skill development opportunities that enable staff to apply new skills to their work. We also designed a Mentorship program for non-technical staff to collaborate with data science experts on projects that will enhance products or increase efficiencies in our processes. Our premise is that everyone should use data to make informed decisions regardless of your background or role in our organization.



### REINVENTION

Data driven decisions have helped us with a bit of reinvention. Just as our workforce is evolving in diversity and 21st century skill building, our [60-year-old building](#) is finally getting a much-needed upgrade. The goal of the renovation is to maximize efficiency of the space, improve environmental conditions, and create collaborative community spaces, like a 'state of the art' training center, for our staff and the public to enjoy in the future. Construction will start in early 2021 and continue in phases over a three-year period. Rethinking how we work

now during the pandemic is helping us plan as we head into work-flow disruptions and office moves required during the renovations. Many of you have experience with overcoming obstacles trying to serve the needs of your staff and users during renovations, so you understand the complexity at hand.

Over the past year, you may have noticed that we have changed some of our product offerings. For the past couple of years, we have conducted in-depth program and product audits. Using data from this process to inform our decisions, we have consolidated our platforms to focus on products that are unique, high-quality and trusted resources. These changes not only make better use of our internal resources and staff expertise, but more importantly, improves the user experience for better discoverability of biomedical information aligned with our core mission and strategic vision. As information professionals – one of our primary user groups – we hope that you appreciate this agile philosophy and goal of making the information we present more findable for all our users.

How is your organization rising to the challenge of being more resilient, relevant, and reinventive? I look forward to future exchange on this topic as we work together to advance the discipline of biomedical research and information. Until then, be safe, and happy holidays!