

Cultivating global connections: a journey through US medical libraries with the Cunningham Memorial International Fellowship



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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of medical research, the role of libraries remains pivotal. In 2023, I embarked on a transformative journey through various medical libraries in the United States, courtesy of the prestigious Cunningham International Memorial Fellowship, generously funded by the US Medical Library Association. I had the privilege of crisscrossing the United States, immersing myself in the rich resources and unparalleled learning environments of various medical libraries. This fellowship not only provided me with the opportunity to explore the vast repositories of medical knowledge but also allowed me to delve into the heart of cutting-edge research and innovation.

This year, with my colleagues from Kazakhstan, Botswana, Zambia, and me from Turkey joined forces, embarking on a journey that transcended borders, fostering cultural understanding and facilitating the exchange of ideas in the field of medical librarianship. Our journey unfolded against the backdrop of the United States, a melting pot of cultures and a hub of innovation in the medical field. The fellowship allowed us to immerse ourselves in the vibrant tapestry of American medical libraries, each one offering a unique perspective on the intersection of healthcare and information management.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, none of our colleagues could travel within the scope of the fellowship for three years. Our mentor and the fellowship committee were always in contact with us for 3 years. They made a lot of effort to make the travel program in the best way. And in the end, the COVID-19 pandemic enabled us four friends and colleagues to meet and have the experience of traveling together.

Through the fellowship program we visited the following libraries, hospitals and university campuses:

- Johns Hopkins University, Welch Library, Baltimore, MD
- National Institutes of Health (NIH), Bethesda, MD
- George Washington University, Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library, Washington, DC
- Library of Congress, Washington, DC
- University of Chicago, Regenstein Library, Chicago, IL
- Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library, Chicago, IL
- Rush University Medical Center Library, Chicago, IL
- University of Michigan, Taubman Health Sciences Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

In every institution we visited, all our colleagues welcomed us with interest. We are grateful to all of them!

Collaborative spaces

American medical libraries showcased a commitment to fostering collaboration. We observed collaborative spaces that encouraged interdisciplinary research and facilitated partnerships between healthcare professionals and information specialists. The collaborative ethos was palpable, sparking discussions on how to enhance collaborative efforts within our own countries.

Community engagement

Community engagement emerged as a central theme during our visits. From outreach programs to initiatives promoting health literacy, American medical libraries demonstrated a strong sense of social responsibility. These experiences prompted reflections on how we could strengthen community ties back home, tailoring our services to meet the specific needs of our diverse populations.

Diversity and inclusion

The diversity within American medical libraries mirrored the multicultural fabric of the nation. Libraries actively promoted inclusivity, embracing the unique contributions of individuals from various backgrounds. This emphasis on diversity challenged us to reconsider the inclusivity of our own institutions, sparking conversations on strategies to make our libraries more welcoming and accessible.

Shared challenges and solutions

As we traversed the landscape of American medical libraries, we discovered shared challenges and collectively brainstormed solutions. The fellowship facilitated an exchange of best practices, enabling us to learn from each other's experiences and adapt strategies to suit our distinct contexts.

Resource allocation

Discussions on resource allocation were particularly enlightening. We explored strategies for optimizing limited resources, whether through collaborative acquisitions or leveraging open-access initiatives. These conversations empowered us to rethink resource management in the context of our own institutions' challenges.

Professional development

The fellowship emphasized the importance of continuous professional development. We engaged in workshops, attended MLA/SLA 2023 conference, and networked with seasoned professionals. This exposure ignited a passion for ongoing learning, prompting us to consider novel ways to enhance professional development opportunities for medical librarians in our home countries. At the same time, we were invited by the scholarship committee to the session "Forging Ahead: Key Insights on Global Health & Equity from Around the World" and provided information about our country to the participants. I also had the experience of presenting a poster at the conference (Subject of my poster: Open Science and Wikimedia: what medical libraries can do with Wikipedia?). We experienced all these experiences with an effective program for about three weeks.

Conclusion: a mosaic of learning

The Cunningham Memorial Fellowship, funded by the US Medical Library Association, has not only broadened my understanding of the vast landscape of medical literature but has also connected me with a network of passionate individuals dedicated to advancing the frontiers of medical knowledge. As the Cunningham International Memorial Fellowship unfolded, each medical library etched a unique impression on my journey. The collective experience painted a mosaic of learning, where the pages of medical literature turned into a canvas of discovery.

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In conclusion, this fellowship has been more than a series of visits to medical libraries; an expedition that has enriched my professional outlook and reaffirmed the profound impact that libraries have on the advancement of healthcare worldwide. This expedition reaffirmed the pivotal role that medical libraries play in shaping the future of healthcare. It was a journey into the heart of medical research, a communion with the past and present, and an exploration of the collaborative future of healthcare knowledge. As I reflect on this enriching experience, I am grateful for the opportunity to explore, learn, and contribute to the ever-evolving narrative of medical discovery.

I recommend the fellowship experience to all my colleagues!



Cunningham Fellows 2023, from left to right: Anar Kairatovna Dautova (Kazakhstan), Mercy Wamunyima Monde (Zambia), Khutsafalo Kadimo (Botswana) and Kubra Zayim Gedik (Turkiye).