Dreams and Reality

The State can not exist without health care: the State and health care cannot exist without information. Both the health care system and the role of the library in it depends on how thick the cloak of the State is, and what are its priorities. What can be achieved by libraries under the Ministry of Welfare (there is no Ministry of Health in Latvia) with 9 branches in the largest cities of Latvia? A lot can be done but is there a possibility to develop, to continue what has been started? Unfortunately there are more questions than answers nowadays

Let's have a look at the statistics in our library, the Medical Research Library of Latvia. This library is the main source of medical literature in the country: it holds around 583,000 printed materials. This number also includes books and periodicals from the beginning of the century, which have only historical significance. In 1999 there were 1249 new acquisitions, 2100 issues of journals (mainly donations) received by our library and its branches. In 2000 we were able to take out 11 journal subscriptions in English and 67 titles in Russian. In 1999, 56% of all materials given out was in Russian, 22% in Latvian and 22% in other languages. Our Inter-Library Loan statistics showed we received 2900 articles and books.

Our users comprise 8000 employees of health care institutions and students. In the Central Library 53% of all visitors are doctors, 28% students, 5% nurses and the remaining 16% includes scientific personnel, specialists of related fields and others. In the branches 40% of total visitors are doctors and 31% - nurses. There are 40 librarians working in total in its main library and its branches.

Historical materials and new technology exist side by side in our library. There is an electronic catalogue in the library, which is also available on Internet (the number of records at the end of year 1999 was 16550). Our most valuable source of information is the PROQUEST medical library database: it depleted most of our budget.

We are using also on-line EBSCO DB Comprehensive Medline with full text. This project is common for all Latvia's libraries and is supported by the Soros fundation. We have not got the Cochrane database yet.

A survey among health care specialists working both in Riga and regions was carried out in our library. We distributed around 600 questionnaires with questions about the use of Internet, language proficiency. We ourselves were surprised by the data gathered – only 32% of all respondents were using computers. 57 % knew at least one foreign language (omitting Russian). This was the situation one year ago and it was then we anticipated the possibility of changing something.

Now we have taken on the responsibility of becoming guides in this chaotic world of information – medicine on the Internet. Our goal is to facilitate this process of dissemination, to help save time and money by offering as wide and varied information as possible and leaving the evaluation and analysis of this information to specialists themselves. Our task is not only to attract the attention of health care specialists with new and interesting information but also to keep them interested by offering services of the highest quality. After we have learnt about medicine on the Internet we want to introduce this new knowledge to our specialists in health care. We are using our library home page http://www.mzb.lv to achieve this goal. Information on library services, lists of new books and journals for those who do not want to spend time looking for them in the catalogue and current news available on our home page have been accompanied by an electronic guide to medicinal resources. It includes around 700 sites organised by MeSH. In the electronic guide to our home page we have put a lot of information including full texts of publications and databases, which do not require pre-paid registration. We are improving our home page which we are creating ourselves with great enthusiasm. We are endeavouring to replace information as soon as it has become non-current.

Another very important task is to deliver information on our activities to our users. We used to disseminate this information through a medical magazine, but it was too slow and inefficient. Therefore we organised a demonstration lecture, together with the University of Latvia, Faculty of Medicine for Faculty staff. We got a surprisingly large amount of response and interest and now we are receiving more and more requests for visits and lectures on Internet resources. We do not yet consider ourselves as experts in Internet searches but we are continually learning in the process and are happy to share our experiences.

Different institutions are interested in different things; some are interested in anatomy materials, others in Internet resources or treatment for osteoporosis. Sometimes there are no computers of full Internet connections available to them. Then we offer to come with our computer and with information from Internet saved on the hard disk. We always invite people to visit our library where all things we are demonstrating and in addition the full assistance of our staff, are available.

Through our activities we are trying to encourage people, and help them to overcome their fear of computers and understand the importance of a virtual library information gathering process. We are not only trying to assist; we realize that we are able to help them in obtaining two major things – time and information. We have realized that an abundance of unsorted information is the same as a lack of information. The result is the same; the reader leaves the library unsatisfied. Our task is not to let this happen. Therefore we keep working, and at moments when it seems almost too difficult to go on we look back at our achievements and realize that we have to keep going; we cannot stop. Only continual movement ensures progress; this is one of the main principles of life. We are grateful to everyone who has supported us in our work.

Velta Poznaka
Medical Research Library of Latvia

Impressions from a visit to the Medical Research Library in Riga

The Baltic countries are geographically and culturally close to the Nordic countries and medical libraries in Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden cooperate with libraries in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Finland has taken a special interest in its neighbour, Estonia.

Norway and Denmark cooperate with Lithuania and Sweden with Latvia.

In order to create personal contacts within medical libraries in Latvia, I made a short visit from Sweden to Riga in late 1998 and visited two medical libraries. The Library of the Medical Academy of Latvia (http:/ /www.aml.lv) gives service to the faculties of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy and Public Health. The Academy library is modern and spacious with a new reading room, and in 1998 over 30 new Internet connected computers for the students.

The situation at the Medical Research Library of Latvia (http://www.mzb.lv) is different. The library is housed in a small, unsuitable building in an old hospital in central Riga.

The Research Library collects and organizes scientific and clinical information in medicine and fields related to medicine. Physicians, medical scientists, nurses and students use the library and borrow more than 200,000 documents per year. The library has a small but very competent staff.

The medical bibliographical index "Scientific Medical Literature of Latvia" is published by the library and all documents included in the online catalogues are indexed in English, Russian and Latvian. The staff has accomplished a lot and the library has its own website and a catalogue online. Unfortunately the library has a very tight budget which allows few subscriptions to medical journals and makes the library dependent on interlibrary document deliveries. The library has more or less informal agreements with over 100 libraries that deliver free articles. Of 3570 ordered ILL's, only 109 were fulfilled within Latvia last year. The rest of the completed ILL's were borrowed from Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany. The library has had various support over the years and acknowledge this on its website. Latterly the Medical Research Library has been selected by the American Medical Library Association's International Section for help, support and cooperation for the coming 5-7 years. Hopefully this will give the library a boost. The staff are prepared. They just don't have all the tools they require to give the service they have plans for.

A view over the city of Riga, capital of Latvia　　　　　*(Donna Flake, USA)*

Eva Alopaeus

The Medical Research Library of Latvia and MLA

The Medical Research Library of Latvia located in Latvia's capital city, Riga, has been chosen for a special honor and a special program. The Medical Library Association's International Cooperation Section (ICS) selected The Medical Research Library of Latvia as one of two libraries worldwide for its new Sister Library Initiative. (The other library is the Medical Library of Holberton Hospital in St. Johns Antigua in the Caribbean; however, Latvia is the topic of this report.) The Medical Research Library of Latvia serves as the National Medical Library of Latvia.

It coordinates 9 branch libraries throughout Latvia. The Director of the Latvian Library, Dr. Raisa Kazankina, has graciously accepted the invitation to join the Sister Library Initiative.

Dr. Kazankina appointed her deputy director, Velta Poznaka, to be the primary contact for the program.

The next step after selecting a library and gaining the acceptance of the library director, was to carefully determine the needs of the library. Velta has been communicating regularly with members of the Sister Library Initiative and sharing the needs of her library.

To further determine the needs of the library, Livija Carlson will visit Riga and the library in August. Livija is currently the head of the Veterinary Medical Library

Raisa Kazankina, Library Director of the Medical Research Library of Latvia

at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul, Minnesota; however, she is Latvian by birth and fluent in the Latvian language. She has also worked closely with the veterinary library in Jelgava, Latvia, and has many U.S.-Latvian contacts. A much more thorough needs assessment of the Medical Research Library of Latvia will be done with Livija's visit. She will work with library staff on a more thorough needs assessment and developing a plan of action to help meet these requirements.

Some of the components of the MLA International Cooperation Section Sister Library Initiative will be:

1.) Identifying US libraries willing to provide a limited number of free interlibrary loans to our two Sister Library Initiative partners.

Prior to the creation of the Sister Library Initiative, Eva Alopaeus from the Kliniska Centralbiblioteket in Göteborg, Sweden, partnered with Latvian medical libraries to provide free interlibrary loans from Swedish medical libraries to Latvian medical libraries. Eva is going to coordinate requests for interlibrary loans from the Medical Research Library of Latvia with US medical libraries who will provide free interlibrary loans. (At the annual meeting of MLA in Vancouver in May 2000, Eva Alopaeus and Elizabeth Husem met with members of the Sister Library Initiative to brainstorm, plan, and coordinate.)

2.) Identifying US libraries willing to donate books and journals to our two Sister Library Initiative Members.

The program has received a great deal of publicity and favorable comment in the US via the MLA News and was an important topic of conversation at the MLA/CHLA joint meeting which was held in early May in Vancouver, Canada. As of June 2000, about 10 libraries have offered materials to the Sister Library Initiative. After the needs assessment has been completed, we can clearly identify which books and journals the Medical Research Library of Latvia require. We know many more libraries will come forward to offer materials.

3.) Fundraising to raise money for travel to professional meetings, classes, hardware, and other library needs of the two sister libraries. This objective still needs much refining and work.

Over the next 7 years the Medical Research Library of Latvia and the Antigua Hospital Library will partner with the Sister Library Initiative Program. Following the initial project, the plan is to apply this model in order to partner with one or two other interested libraries.

Members of the Sister Library Initiative are:
Vicki Croft - Chair of Sister Library Initiative

Latvian Subcommittee:
Donna Flake - Chair
Livija Carlson
Leslie Macker
Antigua Subcommittee:
Avril Reid - Chair
Barbara Ruelle
Janet Fisher
Other Members:
Diane Ebro
Lenny Rhine

Donna Flake
MLA - International Cooperation Section

BOOK REVIEW

Digital Libraries: Philosophies, Technical Design Considerations, and Example Scenarios / David Stern (ed) .- New York; London; Oxford: Haworth, 1999. (co-published as: Science & Technology Libraries 1999;17(3/4)) pp. 230.
ISBN 0-7890-0769-X $60.00 hb.

This book is a monograph simultaneously published as a double issue of Science & Technology Libraries, which is quite usual in Haworth's publishing policy. It comprises a compilation of articles on different subjects, unrelated to each other, collected by editorial invitation and choice. There is no indication about how the authors or the subjects were selected, nor whether these articles were presented at any meeting.
In the first chapter, Philosophies, four authors present their views and thoughts about
organization, collection development in, evaluation of, and search & navigation techniques in the digital library. These authors present their considerations without drawing firm conclusions or statements. Accordingly they add an insight to the complexity of libraries in general and the digital library in particular. In the second chapter, Technical Design Considerations, four articles explain features and elements like data exchange protocols and query and markup languages and it is interesting to read how standardized can have different appearances. The two articles on interface design and object-enhanced user interfaces give an insight into these subjects. In this fast developing field the articles may be already outdated, but the principles are well-explained.
The third chapter, Example Scenarios, consists of two articles, one about geographic information and another about patents. These show particular features of electronic resources and therefore underline some of the specialties and advantages of digital libraries, but in fact these articles are rather short.
The publication is an interesting issue of the journal, containing high quality articles. However, although published independently, it is not actually a monograph *in sensu strictu* and therefore it is hard to conclude at which audience this publication is aimed.

Suzanne Bakker