



Partnerships, Collaboration, Promotion: Role of the Medical Library Association's *Librarians Without Borders*® in Ensuring Quality Information for Improved Health

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Abstract:

The Medical Library Association (MLA) is committed to international outreach and capacity building and has established a new global initiative called Librarians Without Borders® (LWB) to focus association activities in this strategically important area. LWB was established in 2005. It has renewed MLA's historic commitment to assist people anywhere in the world through the belief that improved health, recovery from disasters, building research capability, and other information-intensive needs are enabled through in-country capacity building including librarian training programs, distance education programs, mobilization of volunteers, and access to quality information. MLA believes that building capacity will be most effective and long-lasting when partnerships are created with groups sharing similar goals, particularly partnerships with international agencies where shared goals intersect with available expertise and infrastructure. This paper will present an overview of the LWB strategic initiative in the context of MLA's historic international commitments, and present an update of LWB activities, future direction, and key partnerships which have included the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Program (HINARI), Elsevier Foundation, Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa (ITOCA), WHO/Regional Office for the Western Pacific, and Pacific Open Health Learning Net.

INTRODUCTION

The Medical Library Association has a long and distinguished history of international involvement and promotion of health and information access. MLA was founded at the end of the nineteenth century by citizens of two nations, Canada and the United States. Although MLA has primarily developed as a national organization with headquarters in the U.S., the association has been deeply concerned and directly involved in international activities at various times in its history, most recently with the new long-term, global strategic initiative called Librarians Without Borders®. This paper will briefly trace the historic international involvement of MLA to provide context, review the activities and successes of Librarians Without Borders®, and conclude with some thoughts on the future of MLA's international outreach commitment.

MLA INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES – HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 1. illustrates MLA international milestones that underscore an historic commitment to internationalism beginning with the founding of MLA in 1898 by four physicians and four medical librarians representing Canada and the United States. The milestones depicted in the table and others are memorialized in a number of articles that have appeared in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* and the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* which provide further insight into MLA's international activities¹⁻⁵.

TABLE 1. MLA INTERNATIONAL MILESTONES

Year	MLA Milestone
1898	MLA founded as an international organization by US and Canadian proponents
1924	First MLA committee with an international focus was established to address the high cost of German periodicals
1934	MLA joined IFLA
1947	MLA worked with UNESCO to assist WWII ravaged libraries
1948	MLA began the International Periodical Exchange
1948	Committee on International and National Cooperation (later International Cooperation Committee) established
1953	International news column called "News from London" established in <i>Bulletin of the Medical Library Association</i>
1963	Cunningham International Fellowship established
1980	Program of bilateral agreements with sister associations established
1999	International Cooperation Section launched sister library program
2005	Task Force on Global Initiatives recommended new strategic direction
2005	Librarians Without Borders® Global Strategic Initiative established
2009	Librarians Without Borders® Advisory Committee established

MLA President Eileen Cunningham, after whom the Cunningham International Fellowship is named and who initiated the International Cooperation Committee,

reminded members of MLA's international interests in her 1948 presidential address when she stated:

Our association has always been a very internationally minded group. Years ago, we discussed the idea of adding the word "American" to our name. We decided against it because membership was not then, and is not now, limited to any one country.⁶

Although MLA has developed primarily as a North American and U.S.-based organization, its commitment to international outreach and cooperation has been significant through the years culminating most recently in the Librarians Without Borders® Global Strategic Initiative.

One of the keys to understanding MLA's global commitment is a new international strategic statement which underscores the importance of partnerships and the need to build in-country capacity through qualified librarians, technology, and information access.

- MLA believes that the key elements in improved health for all peoples are the ability of each nation to strengthen and build health sciences information capacity through qualified health sciences librarians, implementation of supporting technological infrastructure, and access to quality information.
- MLA supports capacity building programs at the association, section, chapter, and individual member areas.
- MLA believes that building capacity will be most effective and long-lasting when partnerships are created with groups sharing similar goals, particularly partnerships with international agencies where shared goals intersect with available expertise and infrastructure.⁷

Since 2005 this strategic statement has guided MLA's international programs and its collaboration with sister organizations and like-minded agencies.

MLA/LIBRARIANS WITHOUT BORDERS® – ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

MLA/LWB® (<http://www.mlanet.org/resources/global/>) was established in 2005 and renewed MLA's historic commitment to assist people anywhere in the world through the belief that improved health, recovery from disasters, building research capability, and other information-intensive needs are enabled through in-country capacity building including librarian training programs, distance education programs, mobilization of volunteers, and access to quality information.

MLA has integrated all of its international programs and services under the Librarians Without Borders® program so every international activity that Michael has mentioned and I will talk about are now part of the MLA/LWB® program.

What are these activities? One of MLA's newest LWB® activities that resulted from the Global Initiatives Task Force report is the E-Library Training Initiative funded since 2007 by the generous support of the Elsevier Foundation. Table 2 outlines MLA's e-library training activities to date. MLA member and Fellow Lenny Rhine has coordinated the initiative since its inception. He and others have taught thirty courses of different kinds in eighteen countries around the world. Almost 900 library staff members, researchers, university faculty, health care providers including physicians and nurses, medical students, Ministries of Health and public health staff, pharmacists, medical records and IT staff, and veterinary and agricultural students in developing countries have learned about the HINARI, AGORA, and OARE resources, authorship skills, how to organize workshops to teach others how to access information, and other important information. Kim will be talking more about the HINARI program later.

**Table 2. Medical Library Association Librarians Without Borders®
E-Library Training Program Activities 2007 – 2010**

SITE	YEAR	CLASSES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	PARTNERS*
Vietnam	2007	HINARI- 4 sessions Marketing/Management Evaluating Health Information	65 total 100+ 18	WHO/WPRO CISMI
Nigeria	2007	HINARI, AGORA, OARE plus other modules- 2 sessions	31+	FAO
Nepal	2007	HINARI	25	WHO/SEARO, NHEICC
Zanzibar	2007	HINARI	26	Zanzibar Ministry of Health, DANIDA
Tanzania	2007	HINARI, AGORA, OARE	32	ITOCA, COSTECH
Cambodia	2007	HINARI	30	WHO/WPRO, NIPH
The Gambia	2008	HINARI Authorship Skills	25 12	WHO, National AIDS Secretariat, Medical Research Council
Burundi	2008	HINARI, AGORA, OARE	29	WHO, ITOCA, AHILA, ISABU, FAO, UNEP

Fiji	2008	HINARI- 2 sessions	34 total	WHO/WPRO, Ministry of Health, POLHN
Zambia	2008	HINARI, AGORA, OARE plus authorship skills- 2 sessions	53 total	
Mozambique	2008	HINARI- 3 sessions	36-50 each	ITOCA, AHILA
Solomon Islands	2009	HINARI- 2 sessions	31 total	WHO/WPRO
Honolulu, HI	2009	Train the Trainers	18	MLA
Moldova	2009	HINARI- 2 sessions	43 total	North Carolina Medical Libraries
Australia	2009	Train the Trainers/Authorship Skills- 2 sessions	18 total	ICML
Mongolia	2009	HINARI – 3 sessions	83 total	WHO/WPRO, WHO Country Office
Jamaica	2010	HINARI	40+	PAHO
Washington, DC	2010	Train the Trainers	21	MLA

***Partner Acronyms**

AGORA- Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture
AHILA- Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa
CISMI- Center for Scientific and Medical Information in Hanoi
COSTECH- Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology
DANIDA- Denmark's development assistance to developing countries program
FAO- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HINARI- Health InterNetwork Access to Research Program
ICML- International Congress on Medical Librarianship
ISABU- L'Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Burundi
ITOCA- Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa
MLA- Medical Library Association
NHEICC- National Health, Education, Information and Communication Center, Nepal
NIPH- National Institute for Public Health, Cambodia
OARE- Online Access to Research in the Environment
PAHO- Pan American Health Organization
POLHN- Pacific Open Health Learning Net
UNEP- United Nations Environment Programme
WHO- World Health Organization

WHO/Europe- Regional Office for Europe
WHO/SEARO- Regional Office of South East Asia
WHO/WPRO- Regional Office for the Western Pacific

In addition to the Elsevier Foundation, other organizations have supported this program in a variety of ways. These partners include HINARI, AGORA, and OARE, the World Health Organization's European, Western Pacific, and Southeast Asia Regional Offices, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Information, Training, and Outreach Centre for Africa, Pan American Health Organization, and the Ministries of Health, universities, medical schools, libraries, and hospitals in the countries and cities where the workshops were held..

Beginning in 2009, we introduced another type of course to the program titled the "Train the Trainers" course. The goal of this course is to train MLA members and others so that they can instruct individuals from HINARI eligible countries about important resources and databases, authorship skills, and other information. Lenny taught the course for the first time at the MLA annual meeting and exhibition in Honolulu, HI in May 2009. A "Train the Trainers" course was also presented to attendees at the 10th International Congress on Medical Librarianship in Brisbane, Australia, in August 2009, and also at the MLA annual meeting in Washington, D.C. in May 2010. MLA has offered this CE course free of charge at both of our meetings to encourage members to become engaged in this activity and to also advise them about how to obtain funds to get involved in this activity through Fulbright Scholarships, university partnerships, and other means. During this year we hope to add this course as a tutorial on the MLA/LWB® website.

In April 2010, Lenny conducted a post-course survey⁸ and found that eight of the course participants have already conducted training and/or have developed and promoted HINARI resources including: developing the initial draft of a new HINARI training module titled 'Evidence-based Practice Resources for HINARI Users;' translating the HINARI 'Short Course' into Spanish for use as a self-paced distance-learning course; teaching Short Courses to Mongolian veterinary medicine doctors and Emerging Pathogens Institute Certificate students at the University of Florida; conducting HINARI orientations for Iraqi physicians visiting the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and pediatric clinical staff at the Dorset County Hospital, UK where there is a linkage to a hospital in Chergassy, Ukraine; and finally, teaching 'Short Courses' at various locations in Moldova, the Ukraine and Eritrea.

Besides the e-library training initiative, the MLA/ LWB® program also has a commitment to disaster relief activities. These activities range from promoting disaster relief techniques and information to medical librarians through CE courses and webcasts, and linkages on our LWB® website to the National Library of Medicine and other disaster relief websites. We also have a medical library disaster relief fund that was first established to help medical libraries impacted by Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. In July 2009, MLA was honored by the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) for MLA's contributions to the reconstruction efforts and assistance to libraries damaged by the massive May 12, 2008 earthquake in China. We have also been in contact with the

American Medical Association to try and determine needs in Haiti so we can help as soon as we have identified a medical library specific activity there. MLA's International Cooperation Section and others have donated to the fund to help in the relief efforts.

For many years, MLA has also had bi-lateral agreements with other medical library groups throughout the world. Currently these agreements are with the [Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa \(AHILA\)](#), [Canadian Health Libraries Association / Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada \(CHLA/ABSC\)](#), [European Association for Health Information and Libraries \(EAHIL\)](#), the German MLA (AGMB) (<http://www.agmb.de/papooopro/>), and the Korean Medical Librarians Association (KMLA). We also try to maintain links to other medical library associations throughout the world. Through MLA's International Cooperation Section, we also support health sciences libraries partnerships in cooperation with the UK based Partnerships in Health Information <http://omni.ac.uk/hosted/phi/>. The program (<http://ics.mlanet.org/hslp.htm>), an outgrowth of the Sister Libraries Program, tries to link medical libraries in developed countries with those in developing countries. Numbers of partnerships have been established in this way. The website also contains training materials, grant opportunities, and other helpful resources.

Most recently, MLA, along with other groups including the IFLA Health and Biosciences Library Section, attended a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in November 2009 to give input into the direction of the World Health Organization's Global Health Library that Ian will be discussing. The MLA Board of Directors supports this initiative and waits to see how our association can help.

As you can see, the MLA Librarians Without Borders® program is comprised of several components and will continue to grow as international circumstances change and organizations and projects evolve. For example, thanks to sponsorship by the FlySheet Med-Informatics Co., Ltd., a Taiwan-based company, MLA has established the Librarians Without Borders grant (http://www.mlanet.org/resources/global/lwb_mla_grant.html). The MLA Librarians Without Borders® Grant supports health science librarianship in [HINARI-eligible countries](#) by funding training opportunities and/or the purchase of materials that further the use of biomedical resources for education, research or clinical practice. The terms *materials* and *training* are defined broadly for purposes of the grant. *Materials* could include print or online information resources *in any format*, and may include shipping costs and/or the computer software and hardware necessary to access and use those resources. *Training* could include travel and material costs associated with organizing on-site training or the creation of relevant education modules in an electronic format. The \$5,000 grant is administered by MLA's International Cooperation Section.

Two grants have been awarded to date. The first to Grace A. Ajuwon, Reference and Information Services Librarian at the E. Latunde Odeku Medical Library, College of Medicine at the University of Ibadan in Ibadan, Nigeria. Grace's winning proposal, *Resource needs and capacity development for E. Latunde Odeku Medical Library in Nigeria*, supported the purchase of needed health sciences books for the library's

reference and general collections. The grant will also allow the purchase of three computer workstations with Internet access for the library's e-classroom. The second was awarded to Agnes Chikonzo, University Librarian, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe for her project, *Information Literacy Training for the University of Zimbabwe, College of Health Sciences Students*. This project will assist in improving the search skills of students and staff of the University of Zimbabwe so that they are able to recognize the need for information, identify potential sources, develop successful search strategies and successfully access all sources of information including print, media, electronic, digital and others.

MLA's Librarians Without Borders® program working with our International Cooperation Section continues to seek out other partners with similar missions and goals.

CONCLUSION

Founded over 100 years ago as an international organization, MLA has recently recommitted itself as an organization to its Librarians Without Borders® global initiative. This initiative is viewed as strategic and long-term and, most importantly, complementary to the efforts of other national and international organizations which have similar commitments. MLA is interested in collaborative methodologies that enhance and sustain the Association's international mission. MLA brings a sense of historic altruism and volunteerism to the table and promotes association international efforts as "mission enhancements" and complementary to the activities of like-minded associations and organizations in a true collaborative effort.

¹Homan JM. Becoming an internationalist: reflections on the international activities of Estelle Brodman. *J Med Libr Assoc* 2008 Jul;96(3):242-48.

²Poland UH. MLA's international program. *Bull Med Libr Assoc*. 1990 Oct;78(4):403-5.

³Poland UH. Reflections on the Medical Library Association's international activities. *Bull Med Libr Assoc*. 1982 Oct;70(4):359-68.

⁴Groen F. From affiliation to bilateral arrangement: the evolution of a concept. *Bull Med Libr Assoc* 1980 Jan;68(1):72-3.

⁵The Medical Library Association: the span of its international activities: a chronology. *Bull Med Libr Assoc*. 1971 Jul;59(3):495-511.

⁶Cunningham ER. The association faces the next fifty years. *Bull Med Libr Assoc*. 1948 Oct;36(4):242-7.

⁷Medical Library Association. Librarians without Borders (international strategic statement) [Internet]. Chicago, IL: The Association; 2007 [cited 5 May 2010]. <<http://www.mlanet.org/resources/global/>>

⁸Rhine, L. Post-course LWB "Train the Trainers" survey. [Internet]. Chicago, IL: The Association; 2010 [cited 6 May 2010].

http://www.mlanet.org/resources/global/lwb_trainthetrainers_ce.html