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LIS 610

**Medical Librarianship**

Here I am, standing on the edge of a precipice. Graduation is quickly approaching, but am I ready? Did I prepare myself enough to land that all-important first job after graduation? I would hope that at this point I have; however, one can never be too sure. I went into this project with a bit of apprehension because I was a little afraid, what if the job market is tighter than I was led to believe? What if I’m not as prepared as I need to be to enter the job market? More than just an assignment in examining the current job market I was forced to look at my career goals and devise a plan to reach those goals.

**Future Prospects for Employment and Advancement**

The future prospects for employment and advancement look pretty good. The boom in the need for healthcare professionals includes the need for medical librarians. Like the rest of the library field those in medical librarianship are quickly nearing retirement age and many will retire within the next fifteen years (Kreimer). The only thing is that you must be open to the idea of relocating. Hawaii does not have large community of medical libraries so it might be kind of tough to find a job if you restrict yourself to one geographic location. It wasn’t that difficult to find a number of job postings looking for medical information specialists though the majority of which required at least a year or two of experience there were a few here and there that were open to recent MLIS graduates. A recent 2005 survey of medical librarians done by the Medical Library Association showed that there was 33% drop in the number of new hires
from 2001 it also showed that “Long service of current employees, along with no growth in the percentage of employees in their 20s and 30s reinforces the criticality of succession planning of medical libraries within the next five years” (MLA). One of the surprising things I came across when I looked over all these job applications were that many said that minorities were encouraged to apply. Rubin mentions the difficulties that libraries have in “recruiting a diverse workforce.” This is really encouraging to someone who is a minority. The combination of these facts offers a positive outlook on my future job prospective.

Out of all of the job descriptions I looked at all but one mentioned the possession of a master’s degree from an accredited library and information science graduate program. None of them mentioned a any type of degree in science but most did prefer or require some sort of experience or training with science reference work or course work in the typical medical related fields such as biology, medical terminology, management, or the medical science (Knott). The Medical Librarian Association has a video on their website in which they interview people in the field and one of the points they stressed is that having a degree in one of the health related sciences is not a requirement to be a medical librarian. It seems that what is required is a healthy curiosity and a thirst for knowledge (MLA).

The working environment for medical librarians varies in size and scope it all depends on the organization that your library is associated with. Many health related organizations have small libraries and largely depend on the collections of other institutions, others like academic libraries have larger and more comprehensive collections. Whatever the institution and no matter its size medical librarians work with a
variety of people with differences in backgrounds and in knowledge base. They could be doctors, nurses, or pharmacists, wanting to know the latest medical information in the treatment of their patients or patients and their families themselves wanting to know more about their particular ailment. The field of medicine is very dynamic and research never stops, so to keep on top of most current news and information the medical librarian must be familiar and comfortable with all the latest information technology (Knott). The starting pay rate ranged from $36,000 to $60,000 a year depending on experience and where in the country the job is located. The 2005 salary survey conducted by the Medical Library Association marked the average entry level pay rate at just below $40,000 a year. Obviously places like New York offer a larger salary because the cost of living is higher. The pay scale is lower than other fields, which require an equal amount of education, but no one enters librarianship in pursuit of the “big bucks”.

Throughout all of the literature I read on medical librarianship, including the twenty some odd job postings I looked over, there were a number of skills or traits in which employers actively looked for. A passage from Rubin hit on a number of key words and phrases that riddled the text of the job descriptions that I found things like “knowledge of new information technologies, substantial adaptability and flexibility, creativity, ability to manage change, willingness to take risks, increased ability to plan and supervise, increased skills in determining the information needs of users, ability to create and maintain information systems, strong interpersonal skills, leadership, and vision (Rubin 113). Possessing a solid working knowledge of the latest information technologies is crucial for medical librarians. A survey that recently appeared in the Journal of the Medical Library Association demonstrates why these skills are needed. In
the article 256 medical librarians were surveyed and they reiterated how good searching skills and knowledge of new information technologies are essential to the job. Ninety five percent of the respondents felt that their expert searching skills played an important role at their respective institutions (Holst, 45). For clients of the medical library getting the most current and up-to-date information is of the utmost importance. In order to deliver this information it is crucial that the medical librarian be competent database searcher as well as have a healthy affinity and aptitude for technology. Another skill that was emphasized by many of the job postings I looked at was good oral and written communication skills a number of postings mentioned one of the responsibilities of their potential employees was to conduct classes on bibliographic instruction. The MLA survey also asked respondents what were some of the ways in which they promoted their services and among the methods they admitted to employing were student orientations, brochures, fact sheets, or bookmarks; web pages; participation in department or division meetings; newsletters; and email messages (Holst, 48-49). From these ideas you can see how things like good oral and written communication skills, web design and maintenance, bibliographic instruction, and knowledge in information technologies comes into play in the everyday work of the medical librarian.

This assignment really helped me in identifying skills and experiences that I already posses and others that I need in order to be competitive in the job market. My weaknesses would be in the reference and teaching area. The majority of my library career was spent behind the scenes in the role of library support staff in order to rectify this situation I am going to volunteer or do an internship with either the Hawaii State Medical Library or the at the UH Medical School Library. I did do an internship with the
Government Documents Department of Sinclair Library and spent half of it working at the reference desk but most of the jobs that I looked at wanted people with experience working in a medical library and are familiar with science and medical related information resources. Currently I am taking a class on science information resources and next semester I am going to take a class on medical related resources I may not be able to get a job as a medical librarian immediately after graduation but I am willing to work in a public library or in my current job and beef up my reference skills and become more familiar with science related information resources.

Another weakness that I identified is web design and maintenance. More than half of the jobs that I looked at wanted someone who could assist their organization in web production. I have done some web design through the LIS classes that I have taken but they were simple productions done with simple HTML language. I would like to familiarize myself with some of the more popular web writing programs like Dreamweaver in order to do this I think the best thing to do would be for me to buy one of the more popular web publication programs and teach myself to use it. Aside from web production I am quit confident in my other computer related skills, school and work has made me familiar with the multiple Microsoft office programs and database searching.

In terms of strengths I feel that I have learned a lot in my library classes and in my work as a library technician. My work in the Stacks division of the Hamilton Library circulation department taught me about management, organization and planning. As the Stacks Department we were responsible for keeping the Library’s collection in order and to periodically shift the collection. As one of four supervisors I helped in managing as much as 40 student workers and five security guards. This experience will be a great plus
when applying for a job in some of the bigger medical organizations in which the librarian has several library support staff working with them.

I am currently working in the Serials Department of Hamilton and there is so much that I’m learning that I could easily apply to my future career as a librarian. The work I do in Serials has given me the opportunity to work with vendors, paying invoices, creating purchase orders, and keeping track of the various library accounts. It has also allowed me to do some cataloging work as well as experience with cataloging and acquisitions software. Above all of my previous work experience I think my work in the Serials Department will prove to be the most valuable, no matter where I end up whether it’s a large academic institution or a small office within a medical corporation I will have to perform some or all of the afore mentioned duties in order to provide the best service possible to my patrons.

Looking over all of the job descriptions that I found has been a reassuring process. I now possess a clearer understanding of where I stand within the job market. Many of the job posting I looked at made request for people who are curious, flexible, and adaptable these are qualities I feel I possess. What I need to do is get more experience at the reference desk and familiarize myself with the various science and medical databases. I have also discovered a number of professional resources in terms of websites, listservs, and blogs. One of the most helpful of which is the MLA website, it is chalked full of information for librarians at every stage of their career. I am still a bit apprehensive about moving into the next stage of my career but now I have a plan, I know what I need to work on, and I know what my strengths are.


