

# Out of Hours

## Every home should have one:

the critical role of the research librarian

Today in Canada, most families own a car, a phone, a TV, and a computer. By many people's standards, these are necessary devices with multiple purposes. They link our homes to a world that contains all manner of knowledge and information, and facilitate communication with those around us, as well as help us manage and organise our daily lives.

Like these devices, research librarians are highly functional purveyors and communicators of a variety of important information. Not dissimilar to the software programs and applications that exist on our computers and tablets, research librarians are naturally inclined and trained to collect, funnel, and categorise knowledge and information. What's more, research librarians do what others and their beloved devices cannot. They are avid investigators and organisers. If necessary, they use their experience and expertise to evaluate a plethora of information using the lens of their choosing, and by devising innovative strategies to access and deliver critical information. They do this with an ease and understanding of the problem at hand, in a way that you will not find with any 'app'.

### THINKING OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY WALLS

Research librarians are highly educated and trained professionals. Most librarians require a 2-year Master's degree from an accredited university or institution. Due to the rapid evolution of the digital age in the last decade, library schools have been inundated with applicants from a wide range of educational backgrounds. Many baccalaureate graduates are now discovering the overlap that exists between library sciences and other disciplines, and are actively seeking opportunities to create jobs in non-traditional library settings. Not long ago, those receiving a Master's degree in the library sciences were professionally typecast as becoming a librarian. Choosing the 'type' of library, whether in a public, school, academic, or medical setting, was the one and only decision to be made. Today, more and more librarians are thinking outside traditional career frameworks, and are instead embracing the digital age, with all its technological bells and social media whistles. For example, a 'clinical librarian' is an integral part of a patient care team within a clinical hospital setting. Clinical librarians assume many roles and responsibilities

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embedded within a wide range of activities, including expert searcher, teacher, content manager, and patient advocate.<sup>1</sup> The embedded roles of the clinical librarian are a feature common to other types of non-traditional research librarians, such as those who are part of a health sciences research team.

### ROOM FOR COLLABORATION

Healthcare research teams are larger and more complex than ever before.<sup>2</sup> According to the College of Family Physicians of Canada's *Blueprint for Family Medicine Research Success*, collaboration is a key factor, and an absolute necessity if a research team is to flourish and effectively fulfil their objectives.<sup>2,3</sup>

Stewart and colleagues suggest four critical components of successful collaborative research teams:

- shared goals and vision;
- team-strengthening strategies;
- leadership; and
- communication structures.<sup>2</sup>

Research librarians can offer skills in all four areas; however, it is the communication component where they are most relevant and can have the biggest impact. Research librarians can offer expertise when developing in-person, as well as web-based 'communication platforms'.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the research librarian is an 'information architect', having a keen sense of how the information should be displayed, archived, and shared, both internally and externally. Such a team member helps keep the objectives of the research programme on target. Furthermore, research librarians

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are expert searchers and know how to gain access to resources from a variety of traditional and electronic formats and media. They are a critical member of the research team, especially when systematic reviews, grant proposal writing, and manuscript submissions are involved.

### CONCLUSION

As the healthcare field continues to evolve and adapt, it is important that the benefits of research librarians, in their numerous guises, such as health sciences librarian, medical information specialist, informationist, and clinical librarian, are fully recognised and utilised. In today's research environment, research librarians with a Master's degree in Library and Information Studies (MLIS), or Library Sciences (MLS), offer a wide range of specialised skills and competencies that can add tremendous value to any healthcare setting.

You wouldn't leave home without your mobile phone, so why would you conduct research without a medical librarian?

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