

- Lack of journal titles and duplication of subscription to certain titles

For a long time, Chinese medical libraries have done things on their own behalf, and there has been little exchange and cooperation among the libraries. Lack of macro-control and coordination mechanisms resulted in a nationwide lack of biomedical journal titles and duplication of subscription to certain titles. There are dozens of copies for certain journal titles which are distributed in the coastal areas and major cities, while there is no copy in remote regions such as Ningxia, Qinghai and Tibet. In 1993, the total foreign medical journals subscribed to by the 118 membership libraries of ALCMMC amounted to 11,295 copies with only 3,012 titles. Many periodicals appear several times on subscription lists while many other important journals are completely left out. Due to this it is difficult to increase the overall number of titles nationwide.

- Nationwide decrease in medical literature collections due to the rising prices of publications

Recently, prices of books and journals have been increased both at home and abroad, especially subscription of foreign journals have risen at an annual rate of 15%-20%. The price rises result in rapid growth of the expenditure for ordering foreign journals. The annual budget of each library not only has been increased with price rises, but also has experienced a decrease. Many libraries have been unable to keep their collections as they had. Before 1988, the foreign medical journal collection of the Library of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences was able to satisfy 80% of the demands for original medical literature from readers who retrieved the foreign literature information by means of computer connection or CD-ROMs; in 1994, the percentage dropped to 22.6% while the foreign medical journal collections of the 104 all member libraries of the ALCMMC together could only meet 56.6% of the readers demands for the originals. This reflects that the medical literature collections have diminished. The only way to escape this predicament is to strengthen the cooperation and realize the mutual collection resources sharing among the libraries.

The Coordinate Network Organization of Chinese Medical Libraries

Most Chinese medical libraries were established in the 1950s, each of which is independent and only provides services to its own institution. After the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China, the government devoted great attention to the library undertaking. It promulgated a series of policies and set up a special administration organ. The measures brought about rapid development of the Chinese library undertaking. Since 1978, especially the 1980s, the successive establishments of the organs such as the China Society for Library Science, National Committee on Library and Information Service of University as well as

some other national/local library coordination organizations have propelled the Chinese library undertaking forward. In 1981, China resumed its legal seat at the IFLA, which enhanced the extensive cooperation and exchange between the Chinese libraries and their counterparts worldwide.

In 1978, the Ministry of Public Health, Peoples Republic of China sponsored the first National Conference of Medical Libraries, formulated Development Plan for National Medical Libraries (draft) and proposed to establish a medical library coordination network. By six years' endeavors, the ALCMMC was established in 1985, under the support of the Ministry of Public Health. The ALCMMC is an academic coordinate organization, which gets the support of the Education Department of the Ministry of Public Health, Peoples Republic of China.

In order to promote the exchange and cooperation among the member libraries about twenty activities are organized by the ALCMMC all over the country per annum. In particular it has played an important role in such aspects as personnel training, academic exchange, interlibrary cooperation, international contacts, application of new technologies in library and literature resources sharing, etc. The effective activities of the ALCMMC laid a good foundation for the establishment of medical literature resources sharing network of three levels which are national, regional and provincial levels.

Construction of Chinese Medical Literature Resources Sharing Network

During the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the concept of Literature Resources Sharing began to attract the attention of the Chinese medical library community. In 1978, the Chinese medical community proposed to set up a medical information network to accelerate the modernization of medical information work, and establish a modern medical central library network to achieve the goal of making medical literature computer retrieval network available. By 1985, the Institute of Medical Information of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences had successfully set up the publication system for medical literature retrieval with Chinese characteristics, consisting of the Catalogue of Chinese Scientific and Technological Literature (Medical Science), the Catalogue of Foreign Scientific and Technological Literature (Medical Science), the Foreign Medical Science (series), and the China Medical Abstracts (series). In order to create favourable conditions for literature resources sharing, the ALCMMC attaches great importance to editing union catalogues of subscribed and collected foreign biomedical journals, organizing surveys on national literature resources and coordinating subscription to foreign journals, while carrying out extensive academic exchange and coordinate activities. In 1987, the Ministry of Public

Health invested RMB 3.6 million yuan to introduce the database of US MEDLARS and establish the MEDLARS Retrieval Service Center at the Institute of Medical Information of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences. The establishment of the Chinese MEDLARS Centre and the purchases of MEDLINE CD-ROMs by major Chinese medical libraries helped solve the problems facing the users demands for retrieving foreign secondary documents. In 1989, the State Science and Technology Commission aided with RMB 0.5 million yuan to develop the Chinese Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System, which will include all the Chinese biomedical journals of more than 600 titles. Its operation will help supply the users demands for retrieving secondary documents of domestic journals. But the readers higher demands for originals or copies of medical literature can only be met by literature resources sharing. Based on the survey and analysis on the Chinese medical libraries and literature resources sharing of overseas medical libraries conducted by senior medical librarians both at home and abroad under the organization of the Education Department of the Ministry of Public Health, a Plan on Chinese Medical Literature Resources Sharing Network was proposed. In 1991, at the Seminar on Medical Literature Sharing jointly sponsored by the Education Department and the ALCMMC, the plan was passed, which brought about the establishment of the leading group of national medical literature resources sharing project and the corresponding project groups for hardware and software, all under the leadership of the Education Department of the Ministry of Public Health. The ALCMMC was designed to be in charge of the implementation of the plan.

By three years endeavor, the three-levels national medical literature resources sharing network has begun to operate and will gradually realize management modernization. By now, the plan on Chinese medical literature resources sharing network has achieved its goal for the first phase. Its plan for the year of 1993-1997 aims to further improve and strengthen the existing network by means of computers and modern communication equipment, manage to establish, within three years, the four-levels network with more rational literature distribution, better service functions and more benefited institutions, and progressively enable, within five years, the terminal users including those who are in the outlying districts and minority nationality regions to freely retrieve and get medical literature by network.

Strengthening the Construction of Literature Resources and Expediting the Development of Medical Information Network

A modern medical literature information network system involves an advanced literature retrieval system, a powerful literature support system and a developed

communication network. The functions of current Chinese medical information network system are: users can get secondary document by CD-ROMs or medical literature online retrieval network, and primary document by literature resources sharing network. If users can not get the originals or copies of the literature they need, the literature information they retrieve will turn valueless. Therefore I think that China should draw on overseas successful experience in literature resources sharing and information network services, strengthen international cooperation as well as macrocontrol and planning on network establishment, support literature collections, and expedite the construction and development of medical literature information networks. My proposals are as follows:

- a) To formulate an overall development plan on the Chinese medical literature information network, set the goals of national network construction, and define the focal points and progress of each phase.
- b) To draw up regulations on the Chinese medical literature information network, and acts on literature resources sharing, etc., and set rights, duties and work standards of network centres at various levels.
- c) To budget with serious consideration of inflation factors, and provide the national central library with special financial support for their resources construction.
- d) To bring the medical literature information network into line with the national/local government plans on medicine and health.

At present, a project of the ALCMMC on network development is being carrying out. The establishment of CMINET in the 11 key medical universities of China indicate that the undertakling of Chinese medical information has entered a new stage.

Wang Zhaoling
Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences
9, Dongdan Santiao
Beijing 100730