



Successful initiatives and partnerships by a public library to promote health information

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162 — Beyond barriers to accessing health information — Health and Biosciences Libraries Section with Library Services to People with Special Needs

Abstract:

This presentation speaks to the role of public libraries to support health information initiatives, and to how libraries can work in partnership with others to promote health information. It shows how a large urban public library, Queens Library, is redefining its role as the heart of the community by becoming a one-stop information center for the medically underserved and all in the community. The library has fostered partnerships to provide Queens' residents with resources to make informed health decisions. Queens Library is helping to save lives by providing health information to customers, health literacy classes, and raising cancer awareness among Queens' residents. We have three major health components: the Consumer Health Resource Center, a Health Literacy Curriculum for ESOL learners and Queens Library HealthLink.

Consumer Health Resources Center

Queens Library has been providing its consumer health/medical services for many years. The Central Library's medical/health collection, located at the Business, Science & Technology Division, is the most comprehensive collection in the Queens Library system, with approximately 36,000 circulating titles and 3,700 reference titles.

We also have 98 medical/health-related reference periodical titles located in the Business, Science & Technology Division and 7 system-wide research databases that allow us to provide quality customer services.

In the year of 2000, the Central Library received a special grant from The Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation. Originally, the funding from that grant was to be used to create the Langeloth Convalescent Education and Information Center in the Central Library, and to hire a new Medical Librarian to expand our health and convalescence information and education services to customers.

The first Medical Librarian was appointed in February 2001. Originally grant funded, this position became a permanent Business, Science and Technology appointment in 2003. In 2005, the Medical Librarian received his "Consumer Health Credential Certificate" from the Medical Library Association after completing two approved online courses.

Also in 2005, Queens Library became a full member of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM). On that year, Queens Library added started providing Docline services to its customers. This is the interlibrary loan and referral system of the NNLM.

In 2006, The Consumer Health Resources Center was created in the Central Library. It provides customers with a handy reference collection of some 1,200 print titles on consumer health, such as encyclopedias, source books, and directories. More than 3,700 titles are available for circulation. In the same year, Queens Library became the first public library ever to be named a resource library in the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (*Library Journal*, September 15, 2006, Vol. 131, No. 15, p16.). The Medical Librarian was also interviewed and filmed for the PBS TV program "To The Contrary."

Services offered by the Center include:

- Provide general reference and research personally tailored to the individual customer's needs.

The Medical Librarian answers questions and phone calls at the Consumer Health Resources Reference Desk. He also assists with research, including access to Docline. When the Medical Librarian is off-duty from the reference desk during weekday hours, or on weekends/holidays, customers can email their health-related questions to him at the Library's "Ask a Librarian" website page. Customers may also pick up a form to fill out and drop off.

- Increase the number and enhance the health-related subjects covered in the Central Library circulating and reference collections.

The Consumer Health Resources Center reference collection, including the Docline electronic network, joins an already extensive array of print and online information available from inside and outside the Library, in English and Spanish. Docline is the National Library of Medicine's automated interlibrary loan (ILL) request routing and referral system.

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/docline/>

- Provide classes to train staff and customer in use of medical and health databases.

The Medical Librarian also invites the National Network of Libraries of Medicine staff to teach consumer health classes in the Cyber Center of Queens Library's Central Library.

- Conduct outreach activities for customers of all ages.

The Medical Librarian visits various community libraries and answers customers' questions at the reference desk.

The Medical Librarian visits area schools and community centers when holding health-related activities.

- Provide health-related programs and workshops.

The Central Library holds an annual “Health Fair” since 2002. During one of these, a customer's blood pressure reading was unusually high, an ambulance was dispatched and the customer was taken to an area hospital. The Medical Librarian performs outreach assignments such as assisting at health events held at the Queens Hospital Center and at local high schools. The Central Library also held a series of health-related programs and workshops for the public.
- Establish partners and networks with other health-related organizations to promote the Library’s services and programs.

The Central Library staff works in the New York Online Access to Health (NOAH) steering committee and editorial committee. NOAH is a health database developed by academic and public libraries in New York City. <http://www.noah-health.org/en/search/health.html>

The Medical Librarian is a member of the Queens Health Network, and he also joined the Jamaica Neighborhood Asthma Profile committee. The Medical Librarian works closely with the NLM and Docline system to serve customers.
- Create brochures and flyers for customer education.

These include, “We care about your health”, a 29-pages bibliographical brochure featuring consumer health-related reference books, websites and periodicals. Bookmarks about diets, alternative medicine, women’s cancer and prostate cancer among others.

English for Your Health: A Health Literacy Curriculum for Beginning ESOL Learners

Queens Library’s Adult Learner Program (ALP) first became involved with Health Literacy in 2003 when five staff members participated in the Health Literacy Study Circle at the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City. Materials from this project were then incorporated into the ALP’s ESOL classes. It quickly became apparent that, while materials for Health Literacy were becoming available, most were written for either Adult Basic Education students — who are fluent in English, but need to improve their reading and writing — or intermediate or advanced-level English language learners. Therefore, in the Spring of 2005, the ALP applied for and received funding from the Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation to write and pilot a Health Literacy curriculum for beginners. This two-year pilot included writing an original 28-unit curriculum, testing it with 20 classes at the Library, and ultimately making it available on the Web at no charge to other adult education programs.

There were several reasons why it was decided to create a separate Health Literacy curriculum. While the ESOL curriculum included units on health, there was not enough time within a twelve-week semester of 60 hours of instruction to devote more than one or two sessions to health topics since the class must cover other themes to meet the survival needs of beginners. Additionally, if offered as a separate class, this in-depth curriculum could then be selected by those who need it the most, such as individuals with limited access to health care,

or who are already struggling to manage the health care system for themselves or a family member.

What is Health Literacy?

One widely circulated definition of Health Literacy is "the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways that are health-enhancing" (Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards, 1995). It may be surprising to note that 36 percent of American adults — fluent English speakers included — have only basic or below-basic Health Literacy (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003), and that 23 million Americans, or 12 percent of the U.S. adult population, are estimated to have skills at the lowest level (Level 1) on the Health Activities Literacy Scale (HALS), an instrument designed to assess an individual's ability to perform various types of health-related activities, including understanding preventive health practices, following a doctor's instructions, reading medicine labels and navigating the health care system. Individuals at this lowest level would not be able to do such things as determine how often to take medicine. Furthermore, nearly half the American population cannot accurately follow medical instructions, and non-native speakers of English have also been found to be more likely to have lower levels of health literacy (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).

In the ALP survey of 35 students enrolled in one beginning ESOL class at Queens Library in 2004, 73 percent scored "inadequate" in their functional health literacy level. Another 18 percent scored "marginal," reinforcing the need to improve Health Literacy among our own student population.

Student Body

The students enrolled in our Health Literacy classes reflect the diversity of Queens, which has more than one million foreign-born residents — 46.1 percent of the population. The most common languages spoken by Health Literacy learners are Spanish, Chinese and Bengali.

As is typical of the ALP, Health Literacy classes are a mix of individuals with many years of formal education and those with limited prior formal schooling. Some learners are stay-at-home parents of young children, while others work as laborers or retail clerks; and some had been doctors, nurses or pharmacists in their countries of origin.

The target population for the Health Literacy classes is beginning-level students who know at least a few words of English and have some native-language literacy. Those with absolutely "zero" English would benefit more from a traditional beginning-level course, and that the use of text would be too challenging for those without any literacy

Curriculum, Tasks, Materials

The focus of the curriculum is threefold: (1) to help students acquire the language necessary to navigate the health care system; (2) to provide them with content-specific knowledge about the American health care system; and (3) to teach preventive health knowledge.

http://www.queenslibrary.org/index.aspx?page_nm=ALP_for_Teachers

Each unit begins with background information for teachers. Then, each lesson provides a detailed lesson plan and all the needed worksheets. There are also suggestions for Internet sites to visit and other textbook resources to support the unit. An accompanying audio CD – using the voices of ALP staff -- was produced to provide listening activities for many of the units.

The curriculum begins with the basics: parts of the body, describing symptoms and making doctors appointments, much like the health care theme in most textbooks for beginners. We made our own audio recordings, and produced our own “body parts bingo” game and student worksheets for the activities.

Starting at about session seven (out of 20), the curriculum broaches topics that are different from the standard ESL beginner health units. The topics covered include: information about health screenings, reading medicine labels, healthy lifestyle habits, filling out health histories, paying for health care and using the Internet to find health information. Some topics, such as options for obtaining health insurance, are rarely touched upon in any ESOL classes, while others such as healthy eating habits, may be covered, but either not for beginners or not in the level of detail we have provided.

To convey some of the terminology that might be too advanced for beginning English Language Learners, we used translation into native language. For example, students worked with classmates who spoke the same language to fill out a medical vocabulary worksheet, translating a list of words often seen on a health history into their native language. Several students reported that they had taken their medical vocabulary terminology worksheet to their health care visits.

The ALP also wanted to make American content relevant to our students’ cultural backgrounds. One of the many pitfalls about teaching based on the United States Food Pyramid is that the recommended foods do not necessarily correspond to the traditional diets of many of our students. The Food Pyramid has “Milk” as a main category. While the new Food Pyramid does mention calcium-fortified foods, such as calcium-fortified orange juice or soy milk, there is little emphasis on alternative calcium sources. Because the traditional diet of many of our students does not include milk products, we have therefore provided additional information on non-dairy sources of calcium.

The curriculum makes use of actual objects and hands-on activities. For example, students used single-use thermometers to learn about normal body temperature in Fahrenheit. While some — but not all — of the students were familiar with the Celsius scale for normal temperature, few of them knew the Fahrenheit scale. Following a demonstration of how to take one’s temperature, students took their own temperatures, and subsequently practiced their English by asking and responding to the question “What’s your temperature?” by interviewing several classmates.

In the initial phase of developing the curriculum, we collaborated with Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, New York. Hospital staff provided us with some photos, hospital maps and brochures, and also gave us input from the hospital departments as to which topics they considered critical for their patients to know. Queens Health Network (QHN), a health and hospital corporation comprising two major facilities in the borough of Queens – Elmhurst and Queens hospital centers, 15 community-based medical centers and 6 school-based health

centers, was also a resource for us; working with Queens Library staff they developed a brochure on health programs for the uninsured in New York City.

Outcomes

Many students have reported that they felt more comfortable making appointments and talking to their health care provider. A number of students found out about available methods to pay for health care and signed up for programs. Others mentioned that they now knew they had the right to a translator, and understood the importance of giving their name and address correctly. Others commented on what they had learned about practicing preventive health. One student wrote, "I always buy white rice and white bread. After this class, I buy wheat bread and brown rice." One teacher reported that her student had never gone to a doctor because he thought doctors were only for women. After a unit on health screenings, he went to the doctor — and discovered he had high blood pressure.

One unexpected outcome was how the program affected the teachers. Most of the teachers reported increasing their own knowledge of health. One said, "I love teaching this class, because I always learn something new." For many of the teachers, the experience gave them more insight into their students. One surprise was that while most of the parents knew about health care options for their children, they were not aware that there were programs available in New York City to assist all adults — even those without immigration documents.

Plans for the future of the Health Literacy program include a number of improvements. Offering this course as an elective to individuals enrolled in beginners' ESOL classes is under consideration. In this way, learners who now enroll in twice-a week beginning-level classes would have the option of adding a health class once or twice a week.

Teaching Health Literacy to beginners is a challenge, but it is one worth undertaking. Our learners can not afford to wait until they are fluent speakers of English to learn how to navigate the health care system.

Queens Library HealthLink

Queens Library HealthLink (QLHL) is a five-year initiative in partnership with Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the American Cancer Society's Queens Office and the Queens Cancer Center of Queens Hospital. The program launched in 2007 is the only project in the nation that makes available a mobile cancer screening van that visits community libraries, educational programming at community libraries, free or low-cost cancer screening services through the New York State Healthy Living Partnership and facilitates access to cancer treatment at the Queens Cancer Center. All of these regardless of the ability to pay or immigration status. Up until now more than 12,000 people have been reached by HealthLink, and close to 3,000 programs have been presented. During breast exams, lumps have been discovered in more than 12 women, who immediately were referred to the Queens Cancer Center where they have started treatment- free of charge. QLHL is addressing health disparities in Queens via community-based participatory approach. The main goal is to increase cancer prevention.

Queens' cancer statistics alarmingly show a high rate of late-stage detection and therefore, cancer-related mortality. For example, data collected at the Queens Cancer Center show rates

of late-stage breast cancer detection nearly triple the US average, while the rates of colorectal and prostate cancers are twice the US averages. Queens is the most ethnically diverse county in the United States, 47% of its residents are foreign-born, 25% are not US citizens, 16% live in poverty (US Census 2010). All of these are believed to impact Queens' residents healthcare and health-seeking behavior.

The program covers communities and community libraries in twenty neighborhoods. As part of QLHL, collections featuring books, periodicals and multimedia in English and Spanish were purchased for those libraries. Events to raise cancer prevention, screenings and treatment are often presented in partnership with city and local health providers, individual health professionals and community-based organizations. Specialized outreach staff with a Masters in Public Health coordinate events and Cancer Action Councils (CAC) which are composed of individuals and organizations serving the communities covered by QLHL. Based on community participatory approach, the CACs decide what type of strategy to follow to raise cancer awareness. These have included health fairs, skin cancer screenings at a pool and at churches' parking lots, screenings via a mobile mammography unit at a park, and presentations at public housing activity centers and at libraries. At times, the CACs have decided to translate materials in languages spoken by neighborhood's residents such as Bengali, Chinese, Korean, Spanish. The CACs have also designed flyers, brochures and other informational material for distribution in their communities. To sum it up, QLHL services are carefully customized to the local needs of each community.

I've presented examples of three unique programs within the United States to reach out to medically underserved populations. I hope you understand that these programs can be customized according to the needs of particular libraries. Queens Library is a huge system and has the ability to develop large projects, but smaller libraries can adapt initiatives according to their capabilities. I hope these were helpful.

Loida Garcia-Febo speaks nationally and internationally about human rights, access to information, advocacy, services to diverse populations, and new professionals. Currently, she is the Coordinator of Special Services for Queens Library. Received, 2010 Elizabeth Futas Catalyst for Change Award. Named, 2007 Mover & Shaker by Library Journal. Immediate Past President of REFORMA. Currently, ALA Councilor-at-Large, Chairs the ALA Intellectual Freedom Round Table, and the ALA Membership Meetings Committee. Secretary of IFLA's Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression Committee. Works with IFLA's New Professionals SIG which she co-established. Her writing focuses on new librarians, new professionals, multi-ethnic populations, Latinos and other diverse populations.