

THE PITTSBURGH PULSE

Volume 13, Issue 3, October 1999

NEWSLETTER OF THE PITTSBURGH REGIONAL CHAPTER, MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, INC.

From the Chair...

On Friday, September 10th the Executive Board of our chapter met at the lovely home of Terrie Wheeler, Past-Chair. We had quite a long agenda but I'm quite happy to say that the meeting was so productive that we were able to address each agenda item. Some agenda goals have already been accomplished since the meeting! I'm sure you will all be pleased to know that David Brennan, Web Site/Technology Chair, has updated the chapter's web site. David has added a link from our chapter site to MLA National's web page. Our chapter web page now includes all the new changes to the Chapter Officer's directory. Also, you will notice changes to the new Membership Application/Renewal for year 2000. In the near future you will be able to access the Pittsburgh Chapter's Policy and Procedure Manual as well as National's Medical Library Association Chapter Chair's Manual 1999-2000. We hope you will utilize these resources to answer any questions you may have on the operations of the chapter.

I urge anyone who has questions or suggestions to go to the web site for e-mail addresses and phone numbers and either e-mail or call me or any of the Executive Board or the Committee Chairs at any time. We want this web site to serve as a vital communication link for all. Open communications allows for a free exchange of ideas, which can only improve the operations, and vitality of the chapter! Please think of it as a new age "suggestion box," we want your input!

Also on the agenda, at the Annual Training Meeting was the issue of firming up the calendar of events for the year. On October 15, 1999 we will meet at the Pittsburgh Athletic Association for a high tea. Carla Funk, Executive Director of MLA National will report to us on current issues at MLA National. Also addressing our group will be Byron Holdiman of PALINET. He will lead a discussion on Ariel. Ariel is a software package from Research Libraries Group used for transmission of ILL documents via the Internet. This October 15th meeting will be our first business meeting under the new bylaws! You will recall that the bylaws adjusted the time period in which all elected representatives serve. Before the bylaws changes, the Annual Business Meeting was held in the spring. It was at this spring meeting that the newly elected representatives took office. So if it seems like we just had a Business Meeting to you, you are right! We had it in June. Therefore, our October Business Meeting will be somewhat abbreviated and there will be no election announcements as new officers will be not be announced again until next year in October.

We have also done a little future planning and hope to offer our Second Annual Holiday Party in the first week of December. Everyone seemed to enjoy the opportunity to network during an evening meeting in a relaxed environment with old friends in Pittsburgh MLA and to get a chance to make new friends through SLA & WPLLA. So we'll offer it again. For more future planning, the up-coming Docline/Quick Doc changes that have been tentatively scheduled by NLM/Jay Daley for the first part of the year may represent an opportune time for a continuing education meeting. And for those that missed David Brennan's June CE course, "What is it & how do I use it? Technology Essentials for the Practicing Librarian," please note that we expect to offer it again in either April or May 2000. Stay tuned and we'll keep you informed!

Finally, the 2000 Business Meeting which will be held next October needs to have a bit of pre-planning. Are there any suggestions for location, topics or dates? Please inform us of any preferences ASAP. We would like our chapter events to be pre-planned for a minimum of one year in advance as so many of our sister MLA chapters are. If you know of any scheduling conflicts with other associations, special events, or your projects, please let us know! We hope to firm up the October 2000 meeting by the end of November 1999! In addition, we have been approached by the Philadelphia Chapter regarding a joint meeting in either 2002 or 2003! So, please let us know during the meeting at the PAA on the 15th how you feel about this possibility!

**Colleen Lako, Chair
Pittsburgh Chapter, MLA**

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TechLine: (If you can read this, you're fluent in 3 of 9) - Part 1 of 2

Submitted by David Brennan, St. Francis Medical Center

As I approach the third year of writing this technology column, I can appreciate the concern I had when it started, namely, how would I have enough topics to write about? At times, it has been difficult. That's when you get the "smorgasbord" column – things that I don't have enough information or energy to do a whole column on. However, there always seems to be something new or even something to revisit. Mostly, though it has been what I've dealt with or a problem I have solved, or how to do a job more easily. This is more by default than design, and hopefully it has been useful to some of you as well. I'm always open to suggestions for columns.

This column (the first of two parts) falls into the "ways I've learned to do something" category. Here at St. Francis, we're in the process of putting in our first automation system, so now I'm learning about barcoding. The first part of the series will be some basics on barcodes. The second will be about generating your own barcode labels. If you've been using barcodes for years, the first part may seem old hat, but the second column should be of use for everyone who uses them. As background, barcodes are a series of lines that are read and decoded by a laser, LED, or CCD scanner. Their purpose is to save a lot of repetitive typing and to increase accuracy. Bar codes use a "symbology" to encode information, somewhat like a font. Thus, these two codes represent the same number but use different symbologies:



The left code shown above is "3 of 9" (or 39), which is commonly used in library systems. The right is a standard UPC Code that you'd find on grocery items. Symbologies are hardware dependent – different wands and scanners will read different codes. When purchasing a scanner, you will sometimes be asked if you want it "encoded" or "decoded" – this refers to setting the scanner for the types of barcodes you'll be using, as well as other options. These days, most scanners will read a variety of symbologies, but not all of them. If you have a scanner, try reading either of the two codes above. If your scanner can interpret both symbologies, you should see the same number after scanning each code. You will note that the UPC code has an extra digit not seen in the Code 39

example. This is a control code that tells the scanner when the barcode starts and stops. Code 39 also uses such a control sequence, but the code is not visible as in UPC. Each symbology has its own "language." There are many Internet sites such as, BarCode 1: A Web of Information About Bar Code <<http://www.adams1.com>>, devoted to barcodes and barcoding if you are interested in the specifications for each symbology.

The barcode scanner connects to the PC either as a serial device, like a modem or mouse, or as a "keyboard wedge," which means that it goes to a Y cable connected to the keyboard port. Either way, the reader sends the information it receives from the barcode to the application just as if you had typed it, which is why you type in the barcode number if it cannot be read. The information is identical. Needless to say, as in any database application, you should be consistent, and stick to a single symbology. There's no sense inviting problems later when the new wand doesn't read the XYZ code you used for that odd set of labels.

Undoubtedly you've also run into the "smart" vs. "dumb" terminology for barcodes. A "smart" barcode is one that is preassigned to a specific item, and has that call number and title printed right on the label. A "dumb" barcode is just the plain old barcode that can be assigned to anything. Each has its specific purpose, and if your collection is error-free or nearly so as far as cataloging, (or if you are changing automation systems and already have codes assigned) smart codes are the way to go. Since we have a messy initial data file, with many items on our MARCIVE list that we no longer own, I went with dumb barcodes – why waste a code on something that isn't there? Either smart or dumb barcodes are still unique to an item once assigned in a database. Any code can be reused, and once you know how to generate your own, you can take codes that once were "orphaned" and put them back to work. This is particularly useful for patron bar codes: once students move on – as long as they have no outstanding obligations – why not reassign their code to someone else? (Unless you have some great need to have reports run on past groups of students, that is.)

Now that you know what the codes are and how they're read, how do you generate bar codes if you need them? Most people buy them from a vendor, by specifying the symbology and the starting and stopping numbers and any other label information. This is by far the best route for the thousands of labels needed for an initial coding operation, or for those places that use thousands of codes yearly. For those with more modest needs, say in the hundreds per year, or for those

TechLine (*continued*)

special situations that require a small run of unique codes, printing them yourself is faster and cheaper. This gets me in hot water with the bar code vendors, but when a minimum order is 1,000 labels and I'll only need a hundred or so, economics takes over. The 3,000 labels in a box of standard label stock runs about \$20-30, vs. \$100-120 per 3,000 vendor-supplied labels.

Vendors supply a bewildering variety of label stock and dedicated bar code printers for special needs, but library use is a far different scenario than for shipping or retail, where boxes are exposed to the weather or rough handling and the bar code label has to stay on no matter what. Particularly if you barcode on the inside of a book, standard label stock will do fine, and even on the outside, a label protector will do as well for the bar code as it does for the spine label. There are some caveats to this, of course, and you should thoroughly test any codes you produce in the same way you will be using them, i.e., put one on a discarded book and put a label protector over it to see if your scanner can reliably read it. I have noticed that the opaque label protectors sometimes make scanning difficult. Of course this also holds true with the vendor-produced labels.

If you use a wand scanner, you will need a label protector, as repeated contact with the wand will wear the ink off of the label. The laser and CCD scanners that don't come into physical contact with the label will of course have no effect.

Once you know how to create your own, the time involved in printing them is minimal. Creating your own labels is also useful if you need to replace a damaged barcode but don't want to assign a new one to the item, or if you need to make duplicate codes for any reason. You will need several things to print your own bar codes: a decent printer (600 dpi laser or better makes nice clean codes, although I ran a test label on a dot-matrix printer and it still scanned properly- any laser or inkjet should do fine), label stock (I've used Avery 5160 or the equivalent off-brand of standard address labels), and the means for generating the barcodes. Dedicated barcoding software is available (what do you think the vendors use?) but bar code "fonts" are a way of creating bar codes that bypasses the dedicated packages, which are sometimes quite expensive. Just as typing "X" in "Symbol" font in Windows will look like: ☒, typing "123" in "3 of 9" font will look like: ■■■■■■

These fonts can be found at various sites on the Internet, and can be free, shareware, or commercial in origin. Enter "barcode fonts" in your favorite search engine to locate possible sources.

In the next column, I'll outline a method of generating any number of sequential labels using tools you already have at hand: Excel and the mail merge feature in Word.

 (Stay tuned...)

QuickDOC Update

Submitted by David Brennan

As an addendum to my last column about using Excel/QuickDoc to automate the revision of your routing table, this excellent idea was posted to the QuickDoc Listserv by Jean Stubbs (somewhere in the VA system, no address given)

Date: Tue Oct 5 17:28:40 1999

Subject: Re: cells

To: "Quickdoc software" <quickdoc-l@list.umassmed.edu>

By entering the name of the Library, followed by the cell numbers, it is easy to see at a glance where a specific library fits in your routing tables.

EXAMPLE: XYZ TODAY'S LIBRARY 5-3
ANYTOWN, ANYSTATE

XYZ = DOCLINE PREFIX for that library
5 = cell number they are in YOUR DOCLINE routing tables
3 = cell number YOUR LIBRARY is in their DOCLINE routing tables

Using this format, it is also easy to print your Lender/Borrower List for the time period since your last DOCLINE Routing table change to the present and see at a glance the cell numbers as well as the (+/-) lending/borrowing balance with that Library.

EXAMPLE: XYZ TODAY'S LIBRARY 5-3 Loaned 50 Borrowed
50 (+/-) = 0
ANYTOWN, ANYSTATE

This example would suggest XYZ Library is currently in the appropriate cell and does not need to be moved.

Used in conjunction with the techniques described in the last column, this may make maintaining your routing table something you'd (almost) look forward to. Go to QuickDOC and enter the data from your current routing table as Jean illustrates (although I doubt I'd go to the trouble of putting in the cell *your* library is in from *their* routing, but that's a judgement call on your part). Then when you export to Excel, you can simply insert the column for Cell, make one pass through the list, entering the cell number from the library name column into the cell column. Sort, and you have your routing table. This would be much more efficient than my method of find/replace to enter the cell data. I'll certainly be doing this the next time I look at our routing table.

Check out the Pittsburgh Chapter's Website
www.sfhs.edu/library/pmla

NATIONAL NEWS

Submitted by Tomi Gunn, National MLA

MLA Develops Health Care Reporters Seminar

MLA has developed an Internet training seminar for health care reporters. During MLA '99, the association's 99th annual meeting in Chicago, IL, twelve reporters from the Chicagoland area and Wisconsin participated in the Health Care Reporters Seminar which was conducted by Elaine Russo Martin, Director of Library Services, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester and Rama Vishwanatham, Reference Librarians, University of Illinois at Chicago, who developed the seminar's content. The seminar was repeated in June in Washington, DC for health care reporters from USA Today. MLA and PCI, the association's public relations consultant, plan to present the Health Care Reporters Seminar at additional locations around the country. Each seminar will include an introduction to the role of the medical librarian in providing health information with an emphasis on the importance of providing quality information and the librarian's role in retrieving, selecting, and evaluating the best information to meet user needs. A demonstration on how to find health information Web sites of interest to medical writers, including government sponsored sites such as MEDLINEplus, association-sponsored sites such as the American Medical Association site, and subject specific sites such as OncoLink and Kid's Health, will also be presented.

Reporters will have the opportunity to do their own searches and experience the difficulties of searching for quality health information on the Web for themselves. Each seminar will conclude with a checklist for evaluating information on the Web. The seminar course materials are available through the MLA Web site, MLANET:

www.mlanet.org/resources/health_writer/index.

National Medical Librarians Month

Because of the rapid advances in information technology, the role of the medical librarian continues to expand. Medical librarians now serve their institutions and communities as Web managers, database administrators, and health information Internet navigators. Many health sciences information professionals also conduct seminars and teach classes to health care professionals and medical students about finding health-related information on the Web. The timely and accurate information provided by medical librarians can have a major impact on patient care. To celebrate the skills and expertise of these professionals, MLA is excited to sponsor its third annual National Medical Librarians Month (NMLM) during the month of October 1999. "NMLM is a wonderful way to celebrate our achievements and to create awareness of the value of our profession to patient care, health sciences research, and education, as well as to the public's access to authoritative health information. NMLM is a perfect opportunity to blow our own horn!" states MLA President Frieda O. Weise.

In celebration of NMLM, MLA is once again sponsoring the Creative Promotions Award. The award recognizes the medical librarian or library staff who create and implement the most creative and innovative way to celebrate NMLM. The winner of the award receives \$100 in MLA Money, good toward any MLA publication, membership dues, or conference fees. Last year's contest winner, Linda Venis of the Kennestone Memorial Hospital, Marietta, GA, used her MLA Money for her MLA '99 registration fees.

For more information about NMLM, visit the Web page on MLANET <www.mlanet.org/press/nmlmonth.html> or contact Tomi Gunn at the headquarters office at 312/419-9094 x11; mlams@mlahq.org.

MLA Recommends Increase in Funding NLM for 2000 Fiscal Year

MLA recommended that Congress provide a 15% increase in National Library of Medicine (NLM) funding in fiscal year 2000. Marianne Puckett, AHIP, Associate Professor, Medical Center Library, Louisiana State University-Shreveport, testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies on April 21, 1999. Puckett is chair of the Governmental Relations Committee and vice-chair of the Joint MLA/AAHSL Legislative Task Force. "NLM is a national trea-

sure," stated Puckett. "Without NLM our nation's medical libraries would be unable to provide the type of information services that our nation's health providers, educators, researchers, and patients have come to expect."

During her testimony, Puckett addressed the growing demand for NLM's services, NLM outreach activities, and the role of the Next Generation Internet in the delivery of health care. Her full testimony can be accessed at:

www.mlanet.org/government/appropriations/2000test.html

Stethoscoop

Submitted by **Cindy Robertson**
Heritage Valley Health System

- ◆ **KATIE FOWLER** is now with LifeCare Hospitals of Pittsburgh, which was formerly Forbes Metro Hospital. Katie's telephone number is still 412-247-2422. Her new e-mail address is <KatieF@lifecare-hospitals.com>.
- ◆ Corporate mergers, acquisitions, and name changes are prevalent in our regional hospital community. The Medical Center, Beaver, PA and Sewickley Valley Hospital merged in 1996 and now have a new corporate identity: Heritage Valley Health System. **CINDY ROBERTSON** has been named manager of library services and CME for both campuses. She and **LINDA D'ANTONIO**, medical librarian, are expanding library services on the Sewickley campus and sharing resources across the system. Linda's new e-mail address is <ldantonio@vhsnet.org>.
- ◆ **PATIENCE SMITH's** decision to scale back her professional work to part time coincided with an opening for twenty hours a week at the Blaxter Library, Childrens' Hospital of Pittsburgh. A happy coincidence for Patience, formerly of the Allegheny General Hospital Health Sciences Library, and Colleen Lako, medical librarian at Blaxter Library.

**FOUR EASY WAYS TO GET YOUR
INFORMATION INTO NEXT ISSUE'S
STETHOSCOOP**

Mail: Cindy Robertson
Manager
Library Services/CME
Heritage Valley Health System
Dutch Ridge Road
Beaver, PA 15009

Phone: 724-773-1940

Fax: 724-728-7429

E-Mail: crobertson@vhsnet.org

Note: Be sure to include your name, business address, and telephone number with the news you are submitting for "Stethoscoop."

CORRECTION

Scholarship & Awards Committee Report

The text below corrects the erroneous report given at the June 1999 business meeting:

After consultation with Chapter Treasurer Brad Long, the Scholarship and Awards Committee made the recommendation – in accordance with the decision taken by the Board at its training session in 1998 to offer stipends to leaders and potential leaders of the Chapter – to offer \$400 to Chapter Council Representative and Alternate for use in attending the MLA meeting in Philadelphia in 1999. The offer was refused by Ellen Detlefsen and accepted by Karen Zundel. It was approved by the Executive Board at its meeting on March 18, 1999.

The Committee is to meet to write procedures governing this amended use of Chapter funds and will possibly consider fund-raising activities.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth T. Shapiro, Chair
Brad Long
Barbara Epstein

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