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### **The medical audio-visual librarian**

Over the years articles and reviews about audio-visual materials have appeared in the pages of the *MHWLG Newsletter*, so it will not surprise readers to learn that an audio-visual section is now to be a regular feature in the new journal. Medicine has to a large extent pioneered the development and use of audio-visual materials – for teaching, recording and even as diagnostic aids. While each large hospital or medical school was able to support its own medical illustration or audio-visual production unit, the medical librarian often seemed to have no part in this – librarians deal with books, don't they? In recent years there has been a growing awareness that it is not economical for each separate institution to produce slides or video as staff demand, regardless of what other institutions have done. The need to know what materials exist already and where, to build up teaching collections of audio-visual materials to complement collections of textbooks has led production units and teaching staff to seek the help of librarians.

In what way does the role of an audio-visual librarian differ from that of a traditional librarian? Basically not at all. The tools of the trade may differ but the functions are similar.

### **The reference audio-visual librarian**

Leading the user gently towards a precise definition of his requirements is just the same as in a book collection. He may ask: 'Do you have anything on paediatrics?' What he wants may be a 10-minute videotape illustrating the normal psychological development of a 3-year-old child.

The BLAT Library is in fact a book collection, covering health and medical education and educational technology. Much of our time, however, is devoted to providing information about audio-visual teaching materials and, when it comes to answering reader

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queries, we rely not on *Index Medicus* and *BNB* but on sources such as *National Library of Medicine Audiovisuals Catalog*, *British Catalogue of Audiovisual Materials*, *British Universities Film and Video Council Catalogue* and *Health Education Index*.

To make absolutely sure that the information supplied is as up to date and comprehensive as possible we collect catalogues from publishers of English language audio-visuals and index them using a series of very broad subject headings. 5"×3" cards, colour-coded to represent the different audio-visual formats, are marked with the address of the publisher and filed under subject. The complete catalogues are filed by name of publisher. To compile a resource list on any given topic, the appropriate index cards are found and checked in the catalogues for programme details. Other information systems have been described which record details of individual programmes on cards.<sup>1, 2</sup> The advantages of our apparently clumsy system lie in the speed with which new catalogues can be given updated index entries and in the preservation of the ability to browse.

Using this card 'database', resource lists of audiotapes, slides, filmstrips, filmloops, videotapes, overhead projection transparencies, posters and multi-media kits can be compiled by subject on request. Lists of 16-mm films are drawn up by the BMA/BLAT Film Library which has its own indexing system and which uses, in addition to the tools named above, the *British National Film Catalogue* and its own publication, *Medical Films*. The card index and the same reference tools are also used to answer quick queries – requests for just one slide or a specific programme needed to illustrate a lecture. In many cases, programmes can be traced from the title or the author or even, on occasion, from the reference number. (It is surprising how often a bookshop or export agency is supplied with only a publisher's own catalogue number by a customer who obviously believes that ISBNs extend to audio-visuals.)

Many users assume that there are only a few distributors of medical audio-visual ma-

terials. Some of them want a list of addresses to contact: others prefer to locate the one or two whose programmes are most relevant to them. It is for them that the 'browse' facility and the opportunity to compare complete catalogues comes into its own.

Questions that cannot be answered within the Library, e.g. where to obtain the best audio-visual equipment or how to preserve film, are referred to other departments of BLAT or, where necessary, to other organizations.

### The 'open access' audio-visual librarian

The audio-visual section of the Charing Cross Hospital Medical School Library contains about 600 programmes. For a variety of reasons these are kept apart from the book stock but are organized in exactly the same way. The programmes are stored on open shelves and arranged in NLM classified order. All programmes – tapes, slidesets, videos, etc. are in a single sequence and are kept in binders or boxes so that they sit neatly on the shelves. The audio-visual equipment is located in carrels adjacent to the shelves. Students are free to browse through the stock and when they find a programme they want they take it to the equipment, set it up and sit back. If the users need help they go to the general enquiry desk.

Of course having the items on the shelf is the end of a long process. First I have to find out what is available. I have mentioned the standard 'bibliographic' aids before.<sup>3</sup> For current awareness I rely on mailings from the main audio-visual producers and on scanning the relevant journals. *Information* from BLAT is invaluable, as is the *BUFVC Newsletter*. Other useful sources include *British Medicine*, *Medical Education*, *Medical Teacher* and the *Journal of Audiovisual Media in Medicine*.

Once I have identified an interesting programme it is obtained for preview by our academic staff. The response from the staff varies. Some are very enthusiastic about incorporating AV into their courses and will include programmes in their reading lists.

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Others are not so sure but are generally won over when they see how enthusiastic the students are.

When the programmes have been purchased they are accessioned, classified and catalogued. There is no difference between cataloguing a book and cataloguing an audio-visual programme. All that requires adding is a description of the format, e.g. audiocassette, videocassette, slideset, so that a potential user will know what equipment is required. At Charing Cross two sets of catalogue cards are produced. One set is filed in the main library catalogue and the other forms an audio-visual catalogue.

Before a programme can go out on to the shelves it is processed. A videocassette can be treated much as a book with a spine label and library stamp. A tape-slide programme, however, may consist of several units: one or more cassettes, a set of slides in boxes or wallets and a booklet or script. These need to be put into a special binder or box so that the programme can be kept on the shelves. Loading slides into a projector is time consuming so slides are stored in rotary magazines. It adds to the cost but it makes the programme easier to use and is worth while. Several companies supply special audio-visual packaging.

The equipment is perhaps the one thing that most frightens librarians new to audio-visual materials. You should remember that the audio-visual companies spend millions of pounds on designing equipment which is simple and reliable in use. Microelectronics have revolutionized the controls of video-players and tape-slide units. However, librarians can help by providing clear instructions for use. The librarian should be familiar with operating the equipment (including how to replace bulbs!) and should have a service agreement in case equipment does go wrong.

### Conclusion

So, what makes an audio-visual librarian? Answer: someone who can see that the traditional skills of librarianship in storing and retrieving information are not necessarily

hide bound in rigid covers; who can apply those skills to the other formats that exist to complement the traditional book and journal.

### References

- 1 Barker, V. G. & Harden, R. McG. 1979. MAVIS – A medical audiovisual aids information service. *Journal of Audiovisual Media in Medicine* 2, 60–63.
- 2 Heath, J. 1982. A-V MINE – audiovisual information for the educators of nurses. *Audiovisual Librarian* 8, 129–131.
- 3 Clayton, C. 1981 June. The bibliography of audiovisual materials in medicine. *MHWLG Newsletter* 12, 3–5.

### Author's note

It is hoped that the audio-visual feature will become a regular and essential part of this journal. I have many ideas for topics I should like to explore in print and I should welcome your comments, articles, news and views, so please send these direct to me, Margaret C. Jones, Information Officer/Librarian, British Life Assurance Trust Centre for Health and Medical Education, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP.