

## Editorial—*Health Libraries Review*: towards 2000

SHANE GODBOLT *North Thames Regional Library and Information Unit,  
Thames Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education, 33 Millman Street, London  
WC1N 3EJ, UK*

Health care today and the information needs of health care professionals are changing at an ever increasing pace. Everywhere there is turbulence as organizations merge and restructure. Educational reform has brought in its wake the move of nurse education into higher education. The need to change from the traditional educational paradigm of lecture-based instruction to the learner-centred format of 'problem-based learning' is profoundly affecting medical education curricula. There is also a high priority now being given to evidence-based health care and the need for us all to evaluate, monitor and audit our services. In today's complex environment, both in the UK and in Europe, there are new issues which cut across the traditional resource sharing culture, yet we must continue to work within networks in order to provide an effective and efficient service. All these issues are challenges facing us as information providers today. How do we keep abreast of these changes and developments?

Since its launch in 1984, *Health Libraries Review* (HLR), the official Journal of the Library Association Health Libraries Group, has matured into an important information source for information professionals working in the health and community care fields, both inside and outside Europe.

Professional communication is perhaps the most vital aspect of professional development, and in 1984 the Group took the initiative of launching a professional journal which aims to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information. The Journal itself grew out of the Group's *Newsletter* which started publication in 1978. Under the Editorship of myself and Paul Valentine, and with active and enthusiastic support from other staff at Charing Cross Hospital Medical School Library, the *Newsletter* grew from 36 pages in 1978 to over 400 in 1983. After much fact finding and discussion it was decided that the publication should be split into a *Newsletter* which would be smaller and would be mailed to all Group members, and an official Journal on a subscription basis. Negotiations were entered into with four publishers. The most attractive package was offered by Blackwell Scientific Publications who already published journals for a large number of learned societies and professional associations. I was appointed, by the Group Committee, as Editor and Paul Valentine continued as *Newsletter* Editor and Assistant Editor of the new Journal.

The jump from newsletter to professional journal was a big one involving an enormous effort both by the Editors and the Editorial Advisory Board. The range of work covered meetings, encouraging and commissioning copy, acknowledging and reading copy received, proof correction, personal contributions, liaising with the publishers and the Group's treasurer and many other administrative tasks. The early issues depended heavily on the quality of the regular contributions from column editors, who have distinguished our profession: Nicky Whitsed, Margaret Stewart, Anne Collins, Bob Gann, John van

Loo and John Hewlett. In 1994 the expansion of work and increasing complexity led to the appointment of Gail Lee as Editorial Assistant.

Over the years *HLR* has addressed a broad range of technological, socioeconomic and current practice issues. It has developed a number of columns of particular interest to members—national and international meetings, book reviews, information technology, media and consumer health. It has also developed a peer review system.

A professional journal must develop its role as a unique specialist resource responsive to the needs of its readership. Strategic planning, a new tool for UK librarians, crossed the Atlantic in the 1980s. The interest and contribution of Susan Crawford, a former distinguished Editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, was invaluable during this time and her interest continues to inform the Journal's development. With her help *HLR* initiated a strategic plan which set out its goals and vision, defined its customer base, developed an action plan and a programme of work. The vision encompassed supporting health care and its delivery through improved communication and co-operation among health information professionals. Ideally this involves responding to the environment by ensuring interactive participation across sectoral and national boundaries. It is also important to support practitioners by sharing and reporting best practice, to encourage innovation and change by reporting research, and to identify new needs of the Journal's readership as the environment becomes evermore complex and challenging.

In carrying out these plans *HLR* has broadened its base to embrace a Europe-wide perspective, and is delighted that Teodora Oker-Blom has joined the Editorial Board. In 1996 she became the first European Guest Editor for a theme issue entitled 'Current Issues in Problem-Based Learning', which drew on expertise from a variety of European settings as well as from North America. Other successful theme issues include:

- Consumer Health Information. Guest Editor Robert Gann
- Current Issues in Health Informatics. Guest Editor Bruce Madge
- Current Issues in Evidence-Based Practice. Guest Editor Margaret Haines
- Current Issues in Staff Training and Professional Development. Guest Editor John van Loo
- Current Ethical and Legal Issues in Health Care Librarianship. Guest Editor Peter Morgan
- Current Issues in Managing for Quality. Guest Editor Joanne Marshall
- Current Issues in Library and Information Services—Responses to Health Service Changes. Guest Editors Joan Day & Graham Walton
- Current Issues in Medical Books: in Honour of Ernest Hochland (a distinguished bookseller of International renown). Guest Editor Valerie Ferguson

To reflect the increasing importance of research and international nature of the profession two new Column Editors were appointed, in 1995 Judy Palmer to cover Research and in 1996 Bruce Madge to cover National and International News.

We are very pleased to have two new Associate Editors, Margaret Forrest who took over from Paul Valentine as Editor of the Newsletter at the beginning of 1996, and Penny Bonnett. Both joined the editorial team at the beginning of this year.

I would like to thank all those who have given so much to *HLR* over the years, particularly Paul Valentine who worked across Journal and *Newsletter* and played a major role in shaping these Group publications in their early years. I would also like to pay a special tribute to Leslie Morton, just appointed Honorary Editor, who has given support expertise and encouragement to the Journal since its inception. Leslie celebrates his ninetieth birthday in July this year and continues to be professionally active.

Recently in the UK a Government White Paper entitled *A Service with Ambitions* has been published. This offers huge opportunities for health care library and information professionals to develop their traditional and valuable roles and to take on new roles. *HLR* needs to be a Journal with ambitions and you the readership will I know accept the challenge to contribute to its development in the future.

