

## Regular Feature - A Day in the Life

### **A Day in the Life of a Medical Librarian in an Academic Family Medicine Department**

**Alex Henigman**

Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA

#### **BACKGROUND**

Alex Henigman is the Medical Librarian for the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The university was founded in 1839 in Columbia, Missouri and was the first public university west of the Mississippi River. It is Missouri's largest public research university. Alex tells us about her role as an embedded librarian in an academic department and provides us with a snapshot of what a typical working day looks like.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Many medical librarians work within central health science libraries or hospital systems, serving broad audiences. My role is different: I am the Medical Librarian for the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Missouri – Columbia, a position that is directly embedded within one academic department. My office sits alongside our research faculty and administrative staff, and my patrons are my colleagues. This allows me to build long-term relationships, tailor my support to the department's specific needs, and take part in projects that extend beyond traditional library services.

#### **MY SETTING**

Our department is multifaceted, with faculty, residents, fellows, and advanced practice providers spread across multiple clinics. In addition to patient care, we have clerkship, residency, and fellowship programs as well as an active research department focused on improving family and community health.

Since many of my colleagues are often off-site (at clinics, etc.), I rely heavily on Microsoft Teams and email to connect with them. I make a consistent effort to reach out so that everyone knows I am here and happy to help, whether they are working on a manuscript, preparing a quality improvement project, or troubleshooting access to resources.

I also stay involved in many internal activities, such as attending monthly research, clinical, and staff meetings, participating in research cohorts, and hosting our Clinical Algorithms Committee meeting each month. These gatherings give me insight into the department's priorities and help me anticipate the information needs of our department.

#### **MY RESPONSIBILITIES**

I believe that the foundation of my work is expert searching, which supports a wide range of our projects, from systematic reviews to clinical questions and quality improvement initiatives. I also assist faculty and residents with scholarly communication, including manuscript editing, guidance on journal selection, and scholarly profiles.

Another significant part of my role is resource navigation. I help colleagues access and use the tools they need for research, education, and clinical care. This includes not only our institution's library resources, but our department intranet, for which I also serve as webmaster. I provide one-on-one orientation for new faculty and staff, and participate yearly in our residents' orientation.

### MY DAY

As all librarians know, no two days are quite the same. What follows is a snapshot of one recent day in my work life.

I always start my morning by stopping by the main department office to say good morning, grab a cup of coffee, and check my mailbox. My office is just down the hall, and on the way back, I run into a clinician with a quick question about a journal submission. I offer to help by reformatting the paper for submission to a new journal – a task that will go on my to-do list for later in the day.

Once I'm in my office, I check my email and review my to-do list. I have author alerts set up for our faculty, and this morning I see that one of them has published a new article. I add the citation to our EndNote library and send the announcement to our communications staff.

I currently serve as Chair of the Education Committee for my regional chapter of the Medical Library Association. Today, our committee meets via Zoom to finalize details for an upcoming webinar we're hosting. After the meeting, I turn my attention to completing a PRESS (Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies) request for a researcher in another department.

October is National Medical Librarians Month here in the US, so I prepare a flyer to be included in our department's October newsletter. Right after, a researcher contacts me about a grant deadline coming up tomorrow and asks if I can format the citations for the proposal.

My afternoon moves quickly. A staff member connects me with a Fellow who needs a literature search for an upcoming Grand Rounds presentation. A clinician requests a book that isn't part of our institution's collection, so I submit an ILL (interlibrary loan) request. I receive an email letting me know another ILL request has arrived for one of our residents. I take a quick walk to the Health Sciences Library to pick it up and deliver it to the residency suite.

Back at my desk, a Teams message pops up asking for help updating information for a systematic review. I hop into the chat to clarify details with the team.

As the day winds down, a clinician reaches out for EndNote help and assistance locating a dissertation. Once I've wrapped those up, I take a few quiet minutes to work on a poster design for an upcoming library conference.

Before I leave for the day, I revisit my to-do list, which keeps me organized and sane. I sort tasks into two categories: what must be done tomorrow and what can wait another day.

### REFLECTIONS

When I started this position, it was my first official role with the title of "librarian." I had the academic background, but being the only librarian in the department meant a steep learning curve. Over time, I've become more integrated with my colleagues, and my confidence and impact have grown.

Working closely with the same group of people has been incredibly rewarding. I've seen research ideas grow into published work and supported projects that directly improve patient care. While working alone can be challenging, I stay connected to other librarians through our central health sciences library and continuing education opportunities. My department has also been supportive of my growth and professional development.

## CONCLUSION

Medical librarians can demonstrate the power of collaboration. By being part of the department's daily work, I provide targeted support that advances both patient care and scholarship. For librarians entering the field, my advice is to focus on relationships. Get to know your users, listen to their needs, and embrace lifelong learning.

I've noticed that the smallest moments are often the most impactful. When a faculty member expresses surprise at how quickly I've found an answer or sends a thank you email for providing access to a resource, I'm reminded of the value of this work. To me, it's about the little things that make the lives of those around me easier.

