

COOPERATION BETWEEN MEDICAL ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN POLAND

Organization of Polish medical libraries

There is a quite significant number of medical libraries in Poland. They differ among themselves in size and use. They are affiliated to medical academies, scientific institutes, hospitals or other health care institutions. In 1949 the Minister of Health established the Central Medical Library in Warsaw, as a central national medical library. In different cities there were founded 16 branches of the Central Medical Library affiliated mainly at hospitals or regional chambers of physicians.

Majority of academic medical libraries were established in the early 50s. as a result of separation of medical academies out of universities. There are 11 academic medical libraries in Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Łódź (at Medical Academy and Military Medical Academy), Poznań, Szczecin, Warsaw and Wrocław. Library of Collegium Medicum in Kraków operates also at the same functional level. Similar aims are realized also by Library of Center for Continuous Medical Postdiploma Education.

The organization of all libraries is alike. They all are cells of wider information system of their mother universities consisting of main library and a library net of faculties, chairs and departments. Numbers of these libraries differ upon university.

Aims of Polish academic libraries

Aims of academic libraries are regulated by the Act of Higher Education. More precise activities are defined at the university and library levels. The libraries are obligated to meet needs in three main areas: research, didactic and service. They serve as regional centers of medical scientific information, and provide services not only to their own students and faculty but also to all health professionals, faculty, researchers and students of other schools, and all interested in medical literature.

Traditional forms of cooperation

Convergence in aims of academic medical libraries brought about quest for different forms of collaboration. At the early stage the cooperation was limited only to exchange of university publications and doublets. To make the exchange efficient there were certain rules worked out. Some university publications were declared as obligatory free deposit copies.

As a next step there was information exchange of holdings, which significantly contributed to the development of interlibrary loan system. With time the form of circulating slips was almost completely given up. The libraries exchanged among themselves lists of new acquisitions and donations, and the Central Medical Library published subscription lists of foreign journals titles. With time the libraries published common serials catalogs.

Problem conferences

With the years passing the libraries realized the pressing need to deepen the collaboration and experience exchange. Bilateral contacts, visits and workshops in the most modern libraries aroused interest in some organizational and technical innovations.

In the beginning of the 80. an idea of yearly medical libraries conferences was born. The conferences were to analyze and solve the problems, unify procedures and search for new forms of common cooperation.

The first conference, dedicated to exchange of information on holdings, took place in Gdansk at December 6., 1981. Following conferences were organized by libraries at different universities. They were dedicated to such problems as interlibrary loan, organization of department libraries, bibliography, medical scientific information, interrelation between central and branch libraries, library instruction, special collections, cooperation in collection and access to scientific medical information, research activities of library issues, didactic at main libraries, consortia, fields of library collaboration, and services based on wide area computer networks. In the last year, the 20. Jubilee Problem Conference took place in Szczecin-Miedzyzdroje. It was dedicated to electronic systems of document distribution. The present year conference will take place in Poznan (Sept. 28-29). The topic will focus on bibliometry and roles of academic library in preparing documentation to parametric assessment of scientific activities of its university.

Coordination team

During the first conference in 1981 there was appointed a body to organize annual conferences. It consisted of directors of main libraries of medical academies. The leader of the team is always the director of the library, organizing next conference. In 1983 within the team a special legal task group was formed.

In 1988 Interlibrary Coordination Committee of Medical Libraries was appointed as an advisory body of the Central Medical Library. In practice, the committee activities focused on coordination of medical library collaboration. The committee consisted of representatives of cooperating libraries. Among them there were 4 representatives of libraries of medical academies. Within the committee, different task teams were formed. The committee finished its activities by the end of 1997 due to the changes in the Library Act.

In 1998 there was created a project of appointing Conference of Directors of Medical Academies as a section of Conference of Directors of Schools of Higher Education. The project was not accepted. In this situation a Board of Directors of Medical Academy Libraries and three-member Executive Board were appointed.

Organization of common training and seminars

Additional forum of experience exchange and common problem solving, beside annual problem conferences, are task group meetings, workshops and seminars. Such events are initiated either by Coordination Committee or individual library. In December 1988 in the Main Library of Medical University in Poznań a seminar on electronic information was held with presentation of Medline database on CD-ROM. Only two months later this database was available in two medical libraries - in Poznań and in Bydgoszcz. Other libraries followed quite soon. In 1992 Main Library of University of Medical Sciences in Poznań, together with two commercial businesses - Stratus and SilverPlatter, organized a conference and presentation on a novel solution that days - access to CD-ROM databases through local area computer network. Poznań library conducted also informal training in strategies in Medline searches.

In 1990 there was also a common meeting of interlibrary loan departments. Although principles of interlibrary loans were regulated during a problem conference in Białystok in 1982, there appeared a need to adjust the rules to new reality, after political changes in the country. That time, publishing of central list of imported journals, because of difficulties in

foreign journals subscription, was discontinued. The libraries obligated themselves to regular exchange of information on received foreign journals (2).

In 1992 representatives of medical libraries from Bia³ystok, Poznañ, and Central Medical Library in Warsaw met in Toruñ in a debate over automation of central catalog of periodicals. In 1997 medical library in Poznañ organized together with Regional Chamber of Physicians a conference on electronic science information systems. At the conference the needs and expectation of different groups of patrons were presented, and assessment of potential to meet those needs by the libraries was done.

Medical libraries are active at conferences of Medical Internet Society. Each year they present there wide offer of services in medical science information. In 2000 the Main Library of Medical University in Poznañ organized a training of SUBITO system usage. In recent years several meetings have been taken place in order to discuss access of medical libraries to NUKAT (Warsaw 2000, Kraków 2001) and to establish cooperation in Polish version of MeSH authority file (Poznañ, Kraków 2001). In 2001 and 2002 in Poznañ there were two meetings on document delivery service doc@med.

Common achievements of Polish medical libraries

Unification of rules of interlibrary loan

In medicine, journals play dominant role in information flow and journal articles are the most often requested publications. Because of high costs no library is able to fully meet all demands on the basis of its own collection. So, the problem of well organized interlibrary loan system is one of the vital issue in quality of library services.

It was a subject of two conferences and several meetings, on which standards of interlibrary loans were set (concerning bibliographic verification, types of documents available, summer breaks, payment rules, telecommunication etc.)

Coordination in periodicals subscription

Decisions concerning relinquishment of purchase of some journals, because of financial cuts, are made after counseling other libraries, making sure that subscription of certain titles will be ensured by other Polish medical library. There also has to be mentioned Interlibrary Coordination Committee and its distinctive contribution in subscription coordination. Due to common efforts even in the most difficult times the basic stock of journals was provided. Journal subscription is also coordinated in communities of each library.

Common journal catalogs

The Central Medical Library, as a coordinator of foreign journal subscriptions, used to publish lists of foreign journal titles purchased by medical libraries. The lists consisted only of general information, not very useful in locating periodicals. So the libraries initiated formation of central journal catalog. Basing on the information, coming from 30 medical libraries, the Main Library of Medical Academy in Bia³ystok prepared two volumes of Central Catalog of Periodicals from Western countries dated 1975-1983 and 1984-1986. Unfortunately, because of organizational problems publishing of the catalog was discontinued.

At the late 80., after decentralization of foreign journals subscription and relinquishment of central subscription lists, the libraries were left without any information on holdings. Quick solution to that problem was an exchange of information on new foreign journals between all

medical academic libraries (2). Basing on that information the Main Library of University of Medical Sciences in Poznań published foreign journal catalog for years 1990-1992. It was the only holdings source in that difficult times. It has been still being used in some smaller libraries without Internet access.

In 1993 procedures of building the catalog were automated. Data was stored in Micro CDS/ISIS. The journal catalog database enabled localization of a journal title, volume and issue in 59 medical libraries. Primary the database was distributed on diskettes, then the system was changed into PROLIB, and the database was rendered available via Internet by the Central Medical Library WWW pages (5).

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Centralny Katalog Czasopism Zagranicznych (CKCZ) website. The page features a navigation menu on the left with links to 'Lista zeszytów' and 'Biblioteki'. The main content area displays information for 'CANCER RESEARCH' (ISSN 0008-5472) and a table of holdings from 1965 to 1978. The table has three columns: 'rok' (year), 'tom' (volume), and 'zeszyty' (issues).

rok	tom	zeszyty
1965	25	1-11
1966	26	1-12
1967	27	1-12
1968	28	1,2,4-12
1969	29	1-5,7-12
1970	30	1-12
1973	33	1-12
1974	34	1-12
1975	35	2-4,6-11
1976	36	1-5,7,9-11
1977	37	1-12
1978	38	1-8,10,11

Fig. 1. Information on holdings of Cancer Research in 17 medical libraries in the Central Catalog of Periodicals (http://195.187.98.4/cgi-bin/wspd/cgi.sh/WService=wsbroker2/wc_opac.w)

The Central Catalog of Periodicals in Polish Medical Libraries is updated on-line by all libraries with Internet access. The libraries without connection, provide data on special forms to the Central Medical Library, which controls and administers the database. So, in collaborative efforts of all medical libraries, great source of information on foreign journals is being produced.

Cooperation in computerization of science information services

Very specific for medical environment is great need in up-to-date bibliographic information. Progress in medicine is very dynamic, and number of publication, presenting new results, is growing each year. That's why automating Polish medical libraries has been started from computerizing science information systems. At the initial stage the efforts were headed towards provision of basic bibliographic databases as well as electronic periodical catalogs and building of own information sources e.g. library holdings and bibliography of Polish

medical publications. Since connected to the Internet, the libraries have widened their services by cataloging and linking to valuable sources of medical information. In 1996 the first library published its WWW pages over the Internet. Soon other libraries followed, using each other experiences.

Information exchange on library collections over the Internet

Access to the Internet widened the possibilities of information exchange among libraries. WWW pages are used by the libraries to present not only general information but also on-line catalogs, lists of new acquisitions, subscription lists, news, services and catalogs of links to relevant electronic information sources such as journals, textbooks, atlases, which are indispensable source of fast information.

Electronic system of document delivery doc@med

The Internet made possible not only to present own WWW pages but also to provide quick and efficient services. In 1996 Internet services based on electronic forms were made available for individual and institutional users by the Main Library of University of Medical Sciences in Poznań. Similar system, named KORNIK, was soon introduced by the Library of Collegium Medicum of Jagiellonian University in Kraków. The libraries of Pomeranian Medical Academy, Collegium Medicum, medical academies in Katowice, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań and the Central Medical Library have already been experienced in exchange of scanned documents. Since 2000 the libraries have been using German document delivery service SUBITO became very popular in scientific community despite high costs. In this situation, it was decided to create own electronic document delivery service based on the stocks of Polish medical libraries.

A project of doc@med system was prepared and presented by the Main Library of Medical University in Poznań at the 20. Problem Conference of Medical Libraries in Szczecin-Międzyzdroje, June 6-8, 2001. In July the principles of the system were set, and the usage was started on Sept. 1, 2001, after preliminary testing.

The system enables supply of electronic form of journal articles from library stacks. At the present, the catalog of available journals consists of over 2200 titles from 5 libraries and it will be enlarged with libraries joining. The catalog is automatically searched, then the order is generated and sent to the appropriate library. After the article is scanned into a PDF file, it is sent to the ordering library or straight to the patron. Orders are to be delivered within 48 hours, but in fact they usually take much less (the average order processing lasts several hours).

Principles of cooperation within the system are precisely arranged and accepted by all member-libraries. New libraries join after signing an agreement regulating terms of collaboration, range and time of services, and forms of payments.

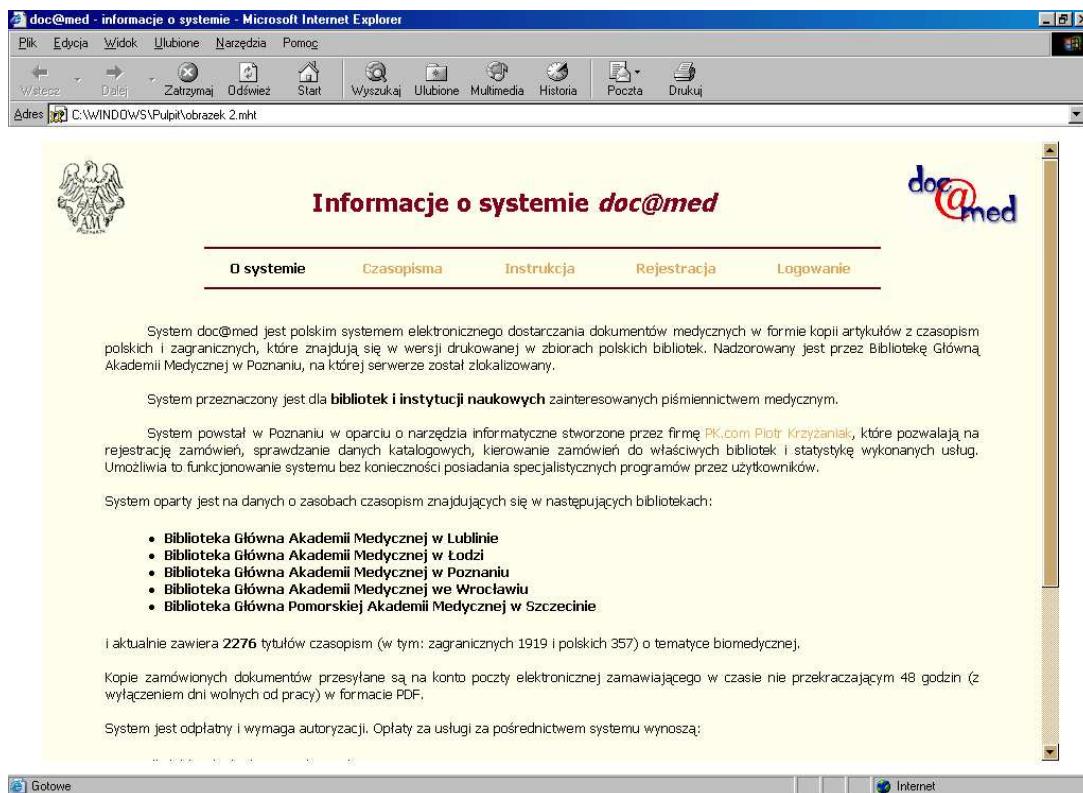


Fig. 2. Information on doc@med system. (<http://www2.bg.am.poznan.pl:8585/o.php>)

Consortium of medical libraries

In the 90., all academic medical libraries, the Central Medical Library and numerous libraries of scientific institutes, were subscribing to many of important bibliographic databases, but they couldn't afford purchase of EMBASE - a database of great value in medical society. In spite of long-lasting negotiations with Elsevier, the conditions of purchase were still not accessible. In 1999 some academic libraries, supported by the Stratus company formed a consortium, which bargained affordable terms of access to the EMBASE database.

Medical libraries are also part of many other consortia organized in Poland. Different consortia were assign in order to access full-text electronic journals (Academic Press IDEAL, Springer LINK, Elsevier Science Direct, Blackwell SYNERGY, Eifl Direct or to subscribe to databases (Current Contents, Science Citation Index). The libraries also form consortia to implement library automation systems: HORIZON (Poznań, Łódź), Aleph (Katowice, Szczecin, Białystok), VTLS (Kraków), TINLIB (Bydgoszcz).

Implementation of unified software to maintain own bibliographic databases

Medical libraries have already had long tradition in documentation of scientific activities and bibliographic analyses. The most significant achievements in this field belong to the Central Medical Library, producing Polish Medical Bibliography. Academic libraries maintain their Alma Matter bibliographies. Each library has elaborated its own methods and criteria of documentation.

Computerization of the libraries enables also automating of bibliographic procedures. In the early 90. some libraries started their bibliographic databases, basing on popular computer

program MicroISIS. Others were trying to tailor their own software. In 1992 the Main Library of University of Medical Sciences in Poznań implemented its own original computer system, enabling not only searching the database, but also preparing statistical and bibliometric datasheets. In next several years, following versions of the system, named EXPERTUS, were implemented in all academic libraries (1), and in 2001 Polish Medical Bibliography was converted to use it.

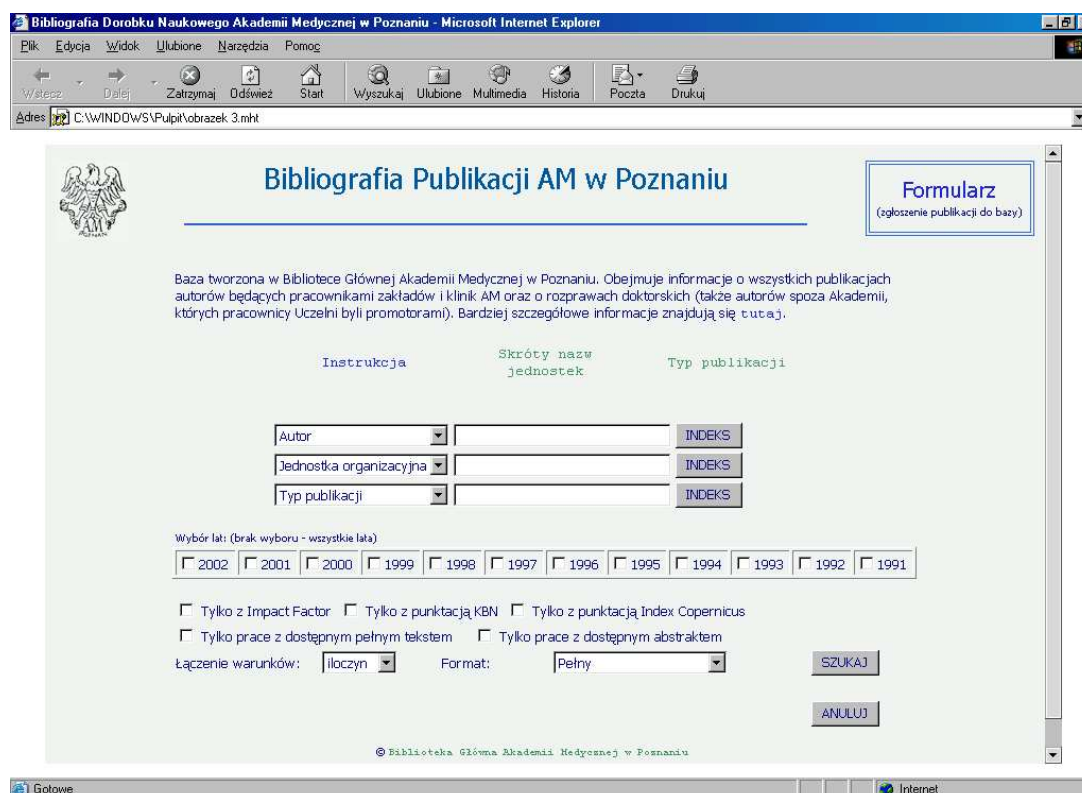


Fig. 3. Search form of the bibliographic database in EXPERTUS system as a WWW page of the Main Library of Medical Sciences in Poznań (<http://test.bg.am.poznan.pl/bazy/publikacje/>)

The unification of the software opens new possibilities in close cooperation in bibliographic activities, especially in building the Polish Medical Bibliography.

Experience exchange in implementation of integrated electronic library systems

Since 1997 academic medical libraries have started implementations of different integrated computer systems. Libraries experienced in USMARC format of bibliographic record or automation of library procedures have shared their knowledge with the other ones. There were organized presentations, consultations, and workshops in Łódź, Poznań and Wrocław.

The biggest problems were associated with document subject description, because there was no access to Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) authority file. In 1997 the Main Library of University of Medical Science in Poznań implemented original MeSH in English into HORIZON system, together with Polish translation. MeSH database, was located on the server of Poznań Foundation of Scientific Libraries. Since 1998 it has been used by the Library of Medical Academy in Łódź, which also operates in the HORIZON system. The

database has gained a lot of interest also by libraries with different systems. After many trials, the access to the database was available to the libraries using ALEPH.

Collaboration in translating MeSH authority file by NLM into Polish language

In 2001 English-Polish version of MeSH authority file was converted onto an independent platform on a server of Main Library of University of Medical Sciences in Poznań. It became possible due to original software made to browse and search the thesaurus. This way the MeSH headings became universal to any library system. Records of the database can be presented in several formats and they can be imported to catalog databases of different systems.

The setting of the database and many additional tools enable on-line contribution towards building MeSH authority file (9).

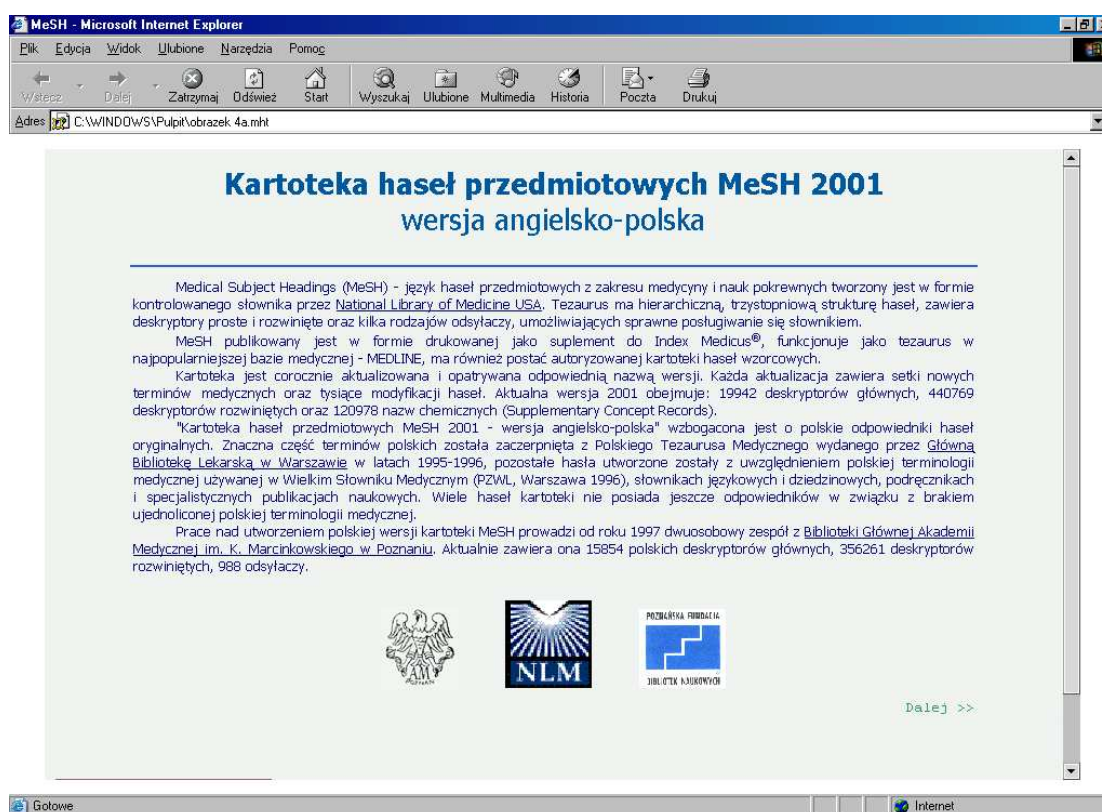


Fig. 4. Information on MeSH authority file in Polish-English version on WWW server in the Main Library of University of Medical Sciences in Poznań (<http://test.bg.am.poznan.pl/mesh/>)

Partnerships with foreign libraries

For many years, because of political setting, foreign contacts were handled in the account of all medical libraries by the Central Medical Library in Warsaw. Representatives of academic libraries started direct contacts with their foreign counterparts only in the early 90. In 1996 Swets & Zeitlinger corporation invited a group of 20 librarians (among them were also medical ones) to visit several German libraries. Contacts with German libraries have been developed since. Next visit to libraries in Göttingen, Köln and Hannover took place in the

beginning of 2000. It started a cooperation within the SUBITO system. Developing the collaboration representatives of the SUBITO took part in the 20. Problem Conference of Polish Medical Libraries.

Another forum of contacts with foreign libraries is European Association of Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL). Some of academic libraries are its members. In EAHIL Bulletin there were some articles on Polish medical libraries activities as well as proceedings of conferences in Kraków (2000) and Szczecin (2001).

Libraries of Medical academies collaborate also with Eastern European countries mainly with Belarus, Ukraine, and Estonia. The forms of cooperation are: workshops on science information (Poznań 2000 - for librarians from Grodno, Belarus, Poznań 2002 - from Minsk, Belarus), exchange of doublets, and free interlibrary loans.

Journal of medical libraries

Due to close collaboration of academic libraries, the Central Medical Library and libraries of medical institutes, long-published Bulletin of the Central Medical Library has changed its character into an organ of medical libraries.

The editorial board consists of the directors of all academic libraries. In the bulletins historical works as well as present events in librarianship and science information are discussed. Conference proceedings and other meetings of medical libraries are published on the regular basis

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