

HEALTH REFERENCE TRIAGE: Health resources for public librarians

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION AWARD

Tuality Health Information Resource Center  
Tuality Healthcare Foundation  
With the Oregon Health Sciences Libraries Association

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## 1. Summary/Introduction:

The project has utilized several librarians to teach classes to public librarians across half the state of Oregon, from the coast to centrally located Bend. Eighty public librarians participated in the four classes that were held during the grant funding cycle. An additional 40 participated in the pre-grant pilot class held in Spring, 2004, at the Oregon Library Association. Six more participated in a class that could not be scheduled until July, 2006, after the grant period had ended. This is a total of 126 public librarians.

A website of links was developed by 10 medical librarians that is hosted at the OHSU website and is available to the general public.

Classes were held in both didactic and hands-on style, the latter being far more successful. Modules were developed, including Health Information Literacy, the Health Reference Interview, Determining Quality of health Information, Print Collection Development for Small Libraries, Online Web Resources from the National Library of Medicine (particularly Pubmed and MedlinePlus), and CAM resources.

## 2. Geographic Region.

Classes were taught in Newport on the Oregon Coast, Portland area, and Bend in Central Oregon. Librarians came from most regions of the state except the Far East: Jefferson and Washington Counties, Albany, Bend, Corvallis, and various coast cities.

## 3. Collaborations.

Tuality Healthcare was the fiscal agent for the Oregon Health Science Libraries Association. OHSLA librarians from around the state participated. All classes were held in partnership with other Public Library agencies or associations, who generally handled publicity and class location sites: the Oregon Library Association (2004 and 2005 Planning Committees and Reference Roundtable), Central Oregon Community College, Washington County Cooperative Library Services (Administration office, Reference Committee and Tigard Public Library), and the Oregon State Library.

All of the agencies provided good logistical assistance and are happy to continue the partnership on an as needed basis. Technical computer assistance was lacking at 2 of the classes, so we proceeded to develop better backup plans with multiple methods to deliver the class, utilizing Powerpoint on disk, overheads, hands-on class syllabus, personal PC, USB and data projection capabilities, paper handouts, or whatever the location required. Tuality Healthcare as a fiscal agent proved difficult to deal with, taking more than a year to pay the first set of teachers and even longer to figure out how to pay the principal investigator. The contributing librarians of OHSLA were in a constant state of flux, going in and out of the project (mostly out) depending on institutional and personal

whim, which put more of a burden on the principal investigator than anticipated at the start of the grant.

#### 4. Training

Four sessions were held during the grant funding period, plus one in advance as a pilot project, and one held after the official ending date of the grant. None of the sessions included even half minority participants. One hundred twenty-six public librarians or public library staff members participated – 40 in the pilot project, 80 during the time of the grant, and 6 after the grant period ended.

5 and 6. April 2004 – a class held at the Annual Oregon Library Association meeting held at the Hilton Hotel in Eugene, OR. 40 participants, 3 Health Science Librarian teachers. Lecture style with Powerpoint demo and displays of Health Resource Centers around the state and Print resources for small public libraries. Planned with contributions from 8-10 health science librarians around the state. Included Health Information Literacy, Health Reference Interview, Print resources for small public libraries. Fairly successful and received good reviews from the participants.

December 2004 – Winter Reference Roundtable of the Oregon Library Association in Newport, OR. 20 participants, 2 Health Science Librarian teachers. This was supposed to be an online demonstration using the OHSU website as the jump-off link source. However, the online connection was so poor that the class was extremely abbreviated and not very successful. Developed Powerpoint as backup for succeeding classes in online resources.

April 2005 – CAM class for Oregon Library Association, Portland, OR. 33 participants, one Health Science Librarian teacher. Online demo of CAM sites in a lecture style. Online connectivity was poor, which made the class difficult. The Powerpoint with live Internet went fairly well once connectivity was established. There were lots of questions from the audience and evaluations were positive. Medium success.

August 2005 – Summer Reference Roundtable for OLA, held at Central Oregon Community College in Bend, OR. 12 participants, 1 teacher. Hands-on computer lab with excellent live Internet connection. The class focused on CAM, Pubmed and MedlinePlus, and included some discussion of Health Information Literacy and Print Resources for small libraries. Excellent evaluations received. A really successful class.

September 2005 - CAM class for Washington County Cooperative Library Services, Hillsboro, OR. 15 participants in a hands-on class in a computer lab with excellent Internet connections. Included Health Information Literacy and some print resources. Excellent evaluations received. Another really successful class.

July 2006 – Online resources for CAM, Pubmed and MedlinePlus class for Washington County Public Library Reference Committee, Tigard Public Library. 6 participants in a hands-on class in a computer lab with excellent connectivity. Good class participation,

using questions submitted in advance by participants. Good evaluations received, but tried to cover too much knowledge in 2 hours. Fairly successful class.

#### 7. Resource materials

Promotion and marketing were generally handled by the sponsoring agency of the class, and usually done by email. The OLA posted their classes on their website as well. Most of the organizations asked for a short paragraph about the class for publicity. Each class was tailored to the needs of the participants, so each publicity paragraph changed to fit the occasion.

#### 8. Websites:

<http://www.ohsu.edu/library/ref/ohslaclass.shtml>

The original webmaster left OHSU early in the project and was eventually replaced by another, but without much enthusiasm. Impact of the website was minimal, as classes didn't always follow the design of the website. The website is not a very exciting layout and could have been much better designed and user friendly.

#### 9. Document delivery and reference services: Not applicable.

#### 10. Approaches and Interventions used

The Oregon Library Association planning committees were used to identify logical places to hold group sessions, scheduled the sessions and planned most of the marketing. The Oregon State Library was supposed to identify individual small libraries across the state that would benefit from a Health Reference Class in their local library, but due to a change in staffing, that did not materialize as planned. Individual teachers planned their own sessions based on the module topics that the sponsoring agency requested. Teachers were identified from the OHSLA members that had indicated an interest in working on the project from a meeting held in July 2003. Web site development was done by an OHSU library staff member who was interested in the project (until she left and was replaced by someone without any real involvement with the project).

#### 11. Evaluation

Most classes were preceded by an email to the registered participants with a request for health reference questions that had proved difficult for them to answer in the past. In some classes (particularly at the spring OLA Annual Meetings), there were paper evaluations filled out by the participants at the end of the session. Unfortunately, the OLA chose not to share them with the teachers, although we asked for the results. They did tell us they were favorable, and some participants said it was the best class they attended the entire meeting. The technical aspects of each class were evaluated by the teachers and changes made with each successive class to provide for more complete backup each time. The participants of the Aug 2005, September 2005 and July 2006

classes were asked for feedback at the end of the class. The July 2006 participants were sent an email asking if they had learned anything new, if they had applied anything they learned in answering health reference questions, what was the best part of the class, and what suggestions they might have for future classes. Results were mixed. It was clear that too much was covered in the last class.

The project as a whole accomplished some, but not all of the stated objectives. 126 public librarians received training on health resources, but few were in their home libraries. The “Favorites” website was developed, but needs some work to make it attractive and more useable. Health Science libraries across the state were advertised at each class as being available to assist public librarians, but this probably resulted in very few referrals to those health libraries. The public librarians really wanted to improve their own skills so they could answer more questions themselves.

#### 12. Problems or barriers encountered.

The early problems with the project centered around connectivity and equipment. This was resolved as the classes went on and a variety of backup resources were developed for every class. Some of the people who indicated an interest early on dropped out of the project after doing their part, others simply didn't do their part and left it to the principal investigator at the last minute to fill in the missing part. A major avenue of advertising did not develop, although with some creative thinking this could have been overcome by using the Libs-OR listserv. That wasn't done. The principal investigator was way over-extended for the entire length of the grant and didn't pursue this as aggressively as could have been done. The fiscal agent had many more difficulties than anticipated paying the teachers, although this was satisfactorily settled eventually.

#### 13. Continuation plans.

OHSLA may choose to continue offering the classes, particularly at state OLA meetings. Staffing will come from those OHSLA members who are interested in teaching, and funding will probably be from their own institutions. Several OHSLA librarians already teach Health Reference classes to the public librarians in their own area, particularly in Eugene, Corvallis, Salem, Portland, and Washington County.

#### 14. Impact.

OHSLA members had hoped that this project would foster more and better relationships between health science and public librarians around the state, particularly if the local health science librarian was involved in teaching or at least, exhibiting at the local class. This really did not happen. Although many sent PR materials that could be displayed or distributed at the classes, the health science librarians usually couldn't get free to come help with the class, or didn't see the need to do so. However, 126 librarians did receive training on health reference resources that was generally really well received and felt that they had gained a lot of knowledge from the classes.

15. Recommendations for improvement.

An improved website, or a website that the group reviews at least once a year, would make a big difference. A principal investigator that wasn't so overextended and delegated more would have helped immensely. Reinvigorating the group with "new blood" would have been a good idea. Finding a new resource to advertise the classes across the state would have helped keep the enthusiasm going for the project.

16. Follow-up questions.

1. Original goals – see second paragraph of #11. Evaluation, and #14.  
Impact. One reason our enthusiasm flagged is the long time line from the first proposal in July 2003 and the end of the project in July 2006.
2. Lessons learned – Projects by committee are not easy. If someone needs to drop out, try to bring in some new, enthusiastic person to replace the one who has left. Work should be delegate to others in the group, but there has to be one person who is actually in charge for accountability.  
Effective strategies – Changing to a hands-on format in established computer labs for the classes resulted in the biggest improvement in the quality of the class.
3. Changes in goals or project plans – The goals were good ones, but the principal investigator was so overwhelmed that there big sections of time with no real progress. The group probably should set a better timeline with more accountability to the group for some of the sections, such as Evaluation, which didn't really get done until towards the end.
4. Recommendations – Pick a principal investigator who will make the project a priority, with regular reports to sponsoring group.

