

Hospital Medical Libraries Populate the Micronesian Region

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Two generous grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) are providing funding to establish or rebuild nine hospital medical libraries in the US-affiliated Pacific Islands. This exciting endeavor began in 2007 when the RWJF awarded the Ayuda Foundation in Guam a year-long grant for \$49,000 to support the rebuilding of the Yap State Medical Library destroyed by Typhoon Sudal in 2004. The RWJF grant was written and implemented by Arlene Cohen, a retired University of Guam Librarian and Alice Hadley, the U.S. Naval Hospital Guam Medical Librarian, together with Carlotta Leon Guerrero, the Ayuda Foundation Executive Director, and Walden Weilbacher, the Association of Pacific Island Legislatures Secretariat and member of the Ayuda Foundation Board.

In April, 2008, after ordering the books, computers, software and materials, Cohen and Hadley visited Yap to set up the library, organize the initial 150 book collection, set up the library automation software and formally opened the Yap State Hospital Mark Durand Medical Library. They also worked with Charlene Laamtal, the newly appointed medical librarian, teaching her the skills to manage and promote the library. Dr. Thane Hancock, a Yap State Hospital physician and the Yap Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Director, expressed his enthusiasm by saying, "Physicians now have access to computers and a medical library resource and can effectively diagnose illnesses and prescribe proper treatments. The new library has become an important resource center for the doctors and health care workers, and it eases the burden on the doctors by providing real-time diagnosis and a faster path to recovery for their patients."

After their April 2008 visit to Yap, Hadley and Cohen were so excited by the success of the project, they asked Leon Guerrero and the RWJF if they would be willing to entertain a new grant to replicate the Yap project. The grant would establish new hospital medical libraries throughout the eight other US-affiliated Pacific Islands state hospitals in Palau, the FSM, the Marshall Islands, American Samoa, the CNMI and Guam. All agreed, and after a Needs Assessment was done by each island, they worked with Michael Epp, Executive Director of the Pacific Islands Health Officers Associate, to draw up a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU). The MOU clearly defined the commitments implied in the project and were signed by each interested Health Minister, thus encouraging the future sustainability of the libraries. These commitments included having each hospital provide a librarian, space for the library, Internet access, a future budget line item for library materials, and support for the librarian's involvement in the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries and Archives (PIALA). The grant was designed to provide funding for books, computers, library automation software, cataloging supplies, and training. Happily, in December 2008, RWJF awarded the Ayuda Foundation \$390,000 for the project, entitled *Replicating the Yap State Hospital Medical Library Project in Hospitals throughout the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands*.



In mid-2008, the Belau National Hospital, in trying to address the critical need for medical information access, appointed Sunshine Garcia as its Medical Librarian to re-establish its outdated and disorganized hospital medical library. Subsequently, and although the RWJF grant had only been submitted in November 2008, Cohen and Hadley visited the Belau National Hospital Library to assist Garcia in weeding the collection, setting up the library automation system, and training her on its use. Soon after the grant was awarded, orders were placed for over 100 new books, computers, and cataloguing supplies. The Belau National Hospital Library is now fully functional.

The second library established under the second RWJF grant was at the LBJ Tropical Medical Center Medical in Pago Pago, American Samoa. Early in March 2009, Ann Fatima Lafaele was appointed its Medical Librarian. Soon after, orders were placed for new books, computers, a multi-media projector and cataloging supplies. After Cohen did the cataloguing of the initial collection in Seattle, Washington, Hadley journeyed to Pago Pago to work with Lafaele. The library was formally opened in May 2009.

In a front-page article on May 30, 2009 in the *Samoa News*, the author, writing about the new American Samoa library, noted that "that the quality of care here will be greatly enhanced with the access the library provides." The article quotes the CEO of the LBJ Tropical Medical Center, Patricia Tindell, as saying "This is a solid step in the right direction for staying with national standards, keeping abreast of world health and medical updates. It means we will be raising the stand of care, with access to updated news and information... we can be remote, but still access 'state of the art' information with this library."

In early August, 2009, Hadley travelled to Saipan to establish the CNMI Commonwealth Health Center Medical Library. Cohen had completed cataloguing the collection in Seattle and Hadley organized the materials while in Saipan. In December, 2009 the library will be formally opened with a medical librarian assigned to manage the collection.

In mid-August, Majuro Hospital in the Marshall Islands appointed Leilani Lanwi as the medical librarian. Work on establishing the medical library is progressing. The formal opening is scheduled early in 2010.

Most recently, the Pohnpei State Medical Library formally opened in November with Merihna Lucios as their new medical librarian. The library was opened in conjunction with the PIALA Conference held in Pohnpei and Cohen presented a paper on the project to the conference participants.

Meanwhile, the Guam Memorial Hospital (GMH) is in the process of hiring a Medical Librarian. Chuuk and Kosrae are still working on appointing their medical librarians. Hopefully, work on these hospital medical libraries will begin in the near future. The grant began in January 2009 and runs through June 2010.

While this grant is being implemented, the librarians are encouraged to keep usage statistics. These statistics are important to provide the hospital administration with evidence of the library's value to their staff. Moreover, it is hoped that when the grant is completed, user surveys will be conducted to further assess the value of these libraries.



This project would not have been possible without the supportive partnerships established between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Ayuda Foundation, PIHOA (The Pacific Islands Health Officers Association), the health ministers throughout the region, and the expertise of Cohen and Hadley. These partnerships provided the seeds to grow these medical libraries into the much needed resource they provide.

After the grant is completed, the future sustainability of these libraries will depend on both the existing partnerships and new ones developed over time. Work on programs for continuing education for the librarians, especially in the area of library advocacy and information access skills is critical. Continuing to work with the health ministers to encourage support and funding for books and materials, and reaching out to new and existing users is also essential. As more people use these libraries, their expectations will drive the libraries to continue and grow.

Last year, realizing the importance of this project, Dr. Mark Durand, the former Yap State Director of Health Services wrote, "A lot of health workers get comfortable with their current practice and wait for workshops to come around for new ideas. A library is more than a physical installation; it is the manifestation of a state of mind which values inquiry and fostering new ideas." ⁽¹⁾

By having easy access to books, the Internet and other information resources, we foster-- as Dr. Durand went on to say-- local "information power" for those ready to embrace it. By establishing these medical libraries, we convey an important message that you can take the initiative to question and a place exists to support that questioning.

Reference

1. E-mail message from Dr. Mark Durand to Arlene Cohen dated July 12, 2008

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"Life is too short to regret and hesitate. Take every opportunity with a smile, and look back with a laugh."

Vivienne Lai





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