

Cancer Librarians Section: Oral History

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Sara Jean Jackson (SJ): (tape cut off beginning of sentence)...Jean Jackson. I'm a librarian at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center – the director of the library. The date is February the 28th, 1989, and I'm here with Marie Harvin, who was director here for several years in the '70's and '80's, who is going to talk with me about the primarily the formation of the Cancer Librarians Section of the Medical Library Association. Marie is one of the people who were involved in the formation of the section. And we would like for her to share her recollection of the situation then and the circumstances surrounding the formation of that section.

Marie, I thought, first of all, perhaps you could begin by briefing us on your background particularly your library career and the positions that you held here and elsewhere, not only when the Cancer Librarians Section was formed but earlier in your career.

Marie Harvin (MH): Thank you, Sara Jean. My name is Marie Harvin. I was born on a remote farm in Cherokee County Texas. When I was three years old, we moved to Nacogdoches, Texas, where I eventually earned my Bachelor's degree at Stephen F. Foster State University. Three years later I received my library degree from George Peabody College in Nashville, TN. While in library school I needed to work part time and fortunately there was a student assistance job at the Vanderbilt University Medical School Library. Again, fortunately for me, Mrs. Eileen Cunningham was the director of that library. I worked a total of five years under Mrs. Cunningham's teaching. I have since worked in a number of different medical libraries, including a 3-year stint at the National Library of Medicine in Estelle Brodman's Records Department. After six years as director at the University of Arkansas Medical Center Library, I came to MD Anderson Hospital as a librarian in 1966, where I served until my retirement in 1984.

SJ: Of course it's your involvement with the Cancer Librarians Section that we're particularly interested in and I know that you've had good experience and good recollection of some of the issues that were involved at the beginning of the cancer legislation that occurred in the early '70's, and I thought that before we discussed the actual formation of the Cancer Librarians Section that, to hear it from you, some of the events leading up to some of the cancer program funding would be of interest to this program here today too. So I'd ask if you wouldn't mind to discuss your recollection of some of the early cancer legislation and the part that you here played in that and Dr. R. Lee Clark, of course, who was at Anderson then.

MH: Well I really don't think you can discuss the Cancer Librarians Section without some of this background, Sara Jean. I think this early legislation was what caused people to perceive a need for the Cancer Librarians Section. And I, too, credit Dr. Clark with this legislation, specifically the National Cancer Act of 1971. But even at the time that I started here in 1966, he was on the path toward getting special legislation passed for cancer research funding. It had been his idea that wherever an oncology department was established in the medical that eventually it got absorbed in either the department of

surgery or the department of radiology and so had to split funding with other activities of those departments. And he believed that if there was a special act passed to enable cancer research funding, that we'd stand a better chance of having sufficient funding for cancer research. And he started in the late 60s to write background and eventually even the legislation that was introduced in the congress and passed in 1971. And as I say, it is all to his credit that this came to pass.

When the Act was passed, it was largely Ann Hutchinson at Roswell Park Memorial Institute that saw the need for the Cancer Librarians Section. We had all of us, the three big cancer hospitals: Anderson, Roswell Park and Memorial Sloan-Kettering. Librarians from these institutions had always been members of the Hospital Library Section, but speaking for myself, I never really felt that I belonged there or that it met my needs. Most of the members of the Hospital Library Section were from smaller hospitals and by the way they formed almost the majority of the MLA members. They packed more wallop than they ever realized, I think. But I would go, I supported their programs but never really felt that it met my needs.

So that when the legislation was passed, it was sometime in '74-'75, somewhere in there, Ann Hutchinson came up with the idea of a separate section for cancer librarians.

Certainly because of this legislation, librarians from all manner of institutions, your medical schools, your larger general hospitals, anybody that thought they might be eligible for funding from NCI, the National Cancer Institute, showing interest in a cancer librarians' section. And according to records we held our first meeting in San Antonio in 1974. I, myself, have absolutely no recollection of such a meeting. But we do have the minutes of the second meeting in Cleveland in 1975, and I do remember that meeting.

SJ: Who were some of the people involved? You mentioned Ann Hutchinson.

MH: Oh yes. Well Dennis Serriane, who was then a librarian at Memorial Sloan-Kettering, was very active in the early days of the Cancer Librarians Section. Of course, Dr. Sourya Henderson with the American Cancer Society attended. But we had librarians from Mayo Clinic, University of California, UCLA, Louise Darling, Adele (currey/currig?) from Ontario Cancer Institute, even Mayo Clinic—Jack Key was there, Mildred Langner from University of Miami, Rose (could/calder?) at Memorial Library, and even people from the Oak Ridge Laboratories library.

SJ: Marie, I would like to ask you to comment a little bit more on why the non-cancer center librarians were interested in the cancer programs and it probably, as I remember going through this material, had something to do with the possibility of funding for them for special collections, for cancer collections. But people such as Louise Darling.

MH: Oh this was certainly the reason they attended because they wanted to track the legislation and possible funding. They felt that any legislation was the idea of cancer centers and NCI laid down very specific guidelines for who could become a cancer center. It was a foregone conclusion of course that immediately Anderson and Memorial Sloan-Kettering and Roswell Park met all these criteria right away. But then your medical schools such as UCLA, and University of Nebraska was another one, had to gear up and meet these requirements that were laid out in the legislation. And within, oh I'd say,

three to four years there were about 11 institutions, most of which were based at medical schools throughout the country. Probably there were eventually many more than that, but that's about the last count I remember off hand. So it was to try to qualify for these funds that these people got interested. Now that the big three, I won't repeat their names each time, had difficulty attracting these funds, strange as it may seem, because NCI felt that we already were qualified as cancer centers and your medical schools got funding much more readily than did the three big cancer hospitals. Also part of legislation was what they referred to as International Cancer Research Databank. And actually this was the only funds that we here at Anderson Library ever became qualified for. I know that UCLA hired a cancer librarian, they bought heavily with moneys from the National Cancer Act, but Anderson Library, here, never got a penny to support acquisitions of materials. All of that was from the government, but this was the reason.

SJ: Yeah. There were several years in there where you mentioned that the first meeting was held in 1974. And of course the Cancer Librarians Section did not become an official section of the Medical Library Association until 1981.

MH: Yes

SJ: So in that time, at those annual meetings, I'm sure the group was meeting informally and putting plans into place?

MH: Yes. As far as I know, we met every year although we were never officially on the program. We always had to scrounge around and find a place to meet and a fairly vacant time slot to meet. But we kept getting together, and I will say that NCI was very generous in sending to these meeting, even though they were unofficial, representatives from this International Cancer Research Databank to let us know the status of the funding from NCI. But we did meet and along came the moratorium, of course, on new sections and the public health people got caught in this too, as well as the cancer librarians. And so it was delayed until June 6, 1981, when the MLA board officially recognized the Cancer Librarians Section.

SJ: Do you remember any of the content of the meetings and the, maybe not even before the official section was formulated, but in the '70's I suppose it was just maybe strategizing on, "What is our approach?"

MH: It was mostly this but also it was largely reports from NCI on what funds were available to cancer libraries and how they might be obtained, and what they would fund and what they would not fund. Most of the meetings were concerned with this issue.

SJ: The minutes of the meetings of the Cancer Librarians Section today, I'm sure, are very different than they were when the group was first organized. Today MLA has made it easy to certainly provide their help with those sections to provide substantive programs and bring in speakers and have official time on the, with the meeting. And I just wondered if you could see any – I know you haven't been involved in the Medical

Library Association since probably 1983 or '84 – but you may have some comments on what the format of the early meetings was?

MH: Yes. I went back and reviewed what I could find in *MLA Bulletin* since the early '80's, and the formats have changed considerably. I think it was 1983 that proceedings of MLA did not report on what had happened but told what was going to happen at the next meeting and Cancer Librarians Section had a report in this. And in I can't think whether it was '85 or '86, sometime since I retired, the format has changed even more radically in that the sections are expected to sponsor general meetings for all of MLA. As far as I could tell from the proceedings that have been published, that has been happening for the last two three years. You probably know more about this than I do.

SJ: I wonder if there's anything else that comes to mind that we might have overlooked or that you feel might be of interest in your recollection of the Cancer Librarians Section. You mentioned some of the people...

MH: No, except that I do think I want to stress, if I have not already done so, that it was Ann Hutchinson's energy and ideas that made this section what (it became), and I'm sure she would have a great deal more to contribute than I have. I realize the situation at the time that we weren't going to have tremendous funds coming into Anderson because of our unique situation, so I didn't really follow it as closely as I'm sure Ann did.

SJ: Well, I want to thank you for taking the time just to sit with me and to review some of these things that did happen not that long ago but once you're removed from it a little bit it does tend to fade. But I think this will be of interest, and it will certainly be helpful in the historical perspective of the MLA Cancer Librarians Section. Thank you.