

"So They Will Know My Wishes"

One Library's Health Info Initiative Became More Than a New Database!

By Scott S. Loman

Abstract

One library's initiative to connect patrons with health information within their libraries and throughout their communities. Working with health care providers and hospitals to encourage end of life discussions, completion of state-approved advance directives, and evidence-based health information resources and services.

Since 1911, Johnson County Public Library (JCPL) of Indiana has been improving the quality of life of its citizens. It is our mission to provide courteous, knowledgeable, and efficient services and access to a broad diversity of information through resources and programs. JCPL serves a population of 145,000 with four branches and a Library Services Center, which is home to our administrative services and the Adult Learning Center.

Our knowledgeable reference librarians are always available to assist and guide our patrons to the best resources in a variety of formats. Whether inside our branches or at home, work or on the road - our resources are easily accessible.

Libraries work to ensure the information available to patrons is current, reliable, and credible. This is especially important with medical and health-related issues, which sometimes can be daunting and confusing. Once a diagnosis is received, most individuals turn immediately to the Internet and the library to learn more about their health. The sheer volume of health information can be overwhelming. Because not everything you find on the Internet is reliable, the library is there to help direct patrons to credible sources. Our online databases and reference resources are state-of-the-art. With just a click, our patrons can tap into the world's medical literature.

Our four branches regularly offer health-focused classes such as: Autism, First Aid, CPR, Heart Disease Awareness, Diabetes, Crisis Intervention, and Cancer Screening. In early 2013, Johnson County Public Library offered a new class entitled, *Charlatans, Leeches, and Old Wives: Healthy Searching for Health Information*. Our goal was to encourage a degree of health information skepticism within our patrons. We discussed the importance of considering the source and scrutinizing the science, explored the National Library of Medicine's *MedlinePlus*, introduced our databases and how to navigate them, and encouraged them to utilize *Book a Librarian*, whereby an individual could meet with a librarian and explore a specific health topic. These classes were well received.

But more was in store for 2013. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) provided us with the opportunity to reach out and develop partnerships with health professionals and community agencies within Johnson County. WindRose Health Network, a community health center that provides healthcare services to low-income, medically underserved and vulnerable residents, asked if we would be interested in hosting health insurance workshops. Their service area extends to all four corners of our county and compliments the areas our branches serve. Together we began providing classes addressing the myriad concerns and challenges of the Affordable Care Act. *Indiana Health Insurance 101* was offered at each of our four branches and individuals had the opportunity to meet with qualified navigators to learn more about their health insurance options.

Another health-related issue that rose to our attention was the subject of end-of-life decisions. One of our reference librarians met with the local hospital librarian and decided to address this issue. All patients, upon admission to Johnson Memorial Hospital, are asked if they have a living will or advance directive. Most patients are unfamiliar with these documents and questioned why they were being asked at that time. Addressing these issues before entering the hospital might bring more comfort and support to all concerned. JCPL and Johnson Memorial Hospital decided to help families and concerned individuals work through these difficult and challenging issues. A proposal to host a county-wide forum in our branches, focusing on end-of-life issues - clinical, emotional, spiritual, practical, and informational - was submitted and approved, with generous financial support by the Johnson Memorial Hospital Foundation. Our joint venture, *So They Will Know My Wishes*, became a reality. Our library hosted a panel that included an RN/ethicist, clinical social worker, chaplain, the hospital's librarian, and one of our librarians. What kind of medical care would you want if you were too ill to express your wishes? State-approved advance directives were presented and detailed as to what would and would not be provided, and how those wishes would be protected. Each person in attendance received a bibliography of library resources and an Advance Directives wallet card, in which they can better share their healthcare decisions and emergency contact information.

While preparing for our panel discussion, we discovered that April 16th was National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD.org). This non-profit organization exists to inspire and empower the public and providers about the importance of advance care planning. They also encourage patients to express their

wishes regarding healthcare and for providers and facilities to respect those wishes, whatever they may be.

Their outstanding resources and mission complimented our programming goals, so we became a supporting member of their organization and as of March 2015, JCPL is one of three public libraries in the nation to do so. Now, every April 16th, one of our branches will host a panel discussion, *So They Will Know My Wishes*, an ongoing commitment of JCPL and the Johnson Memorial Hospital and Foundation to our community.

In listening to those attending the program, we realized that one of the biggest challenges was how to facilitate end-of-life conversations. How do families and loved ones even begin that conversation? In our research, we discovered *The Conversation Project* (<http://theconversationproject.org>). Begun in 2010, this group of concerned media, clergy, and medical professionals gathered to share stories of “good deaths” and “bad deaths” within their own circle of loved ones. Their *Conversation Starter Kit* was just what we were hoping to find and it is now included in our health program packets.

We also discovered card games that provided another conversation opportunity: The *Go Wish Game* (<http://www.gowish.org/>) and *My Gift of Grace* (<http://mygiftofgrace.com>). These games provide a structured conversation about living and dying and are easily adaptable to any situation. These card games are now available at all of our reference desks.

Additionally, we created Health Connect @ JCPL on our Website, www.pageafterpage.org. With one click our patrons can find:

- [Online Library Health Resources](#)
- [Reliable Health Information Websites](#)
- [Making Healthcare Decisions](#)

Within *Making Healthcare Decisions*, our patrons will find all the resources from our *So They Will Know My Wishes* programs and a bibliography of recommended books and videos in our collections.

As we look forward, we are discussing the possibility of enhancing our joint ventures with health-care providers in Johnson County by offering a *Health Information Prescription*. This prescription would direct patients to the library and to *Health Connect @ JCPL*. Our knowledgeable librarians are always available to assist those who are learning more about their specific health-related concerns. Of course, all resources are provided for general informational purposes only and are not intended as a substitute for the advice or treatment of a doctor or other licensed medical professional. Library staff and materials cannot be used to provide medical diagnoses or treatment advice.

The universal need for health information on the part of our patrons provides JCPL the opportunity to establish new

relationships and enhance established relationships. At a time when so many library resources and services are digitized and accessible without patrons ever entering our physical libraries, the provision of health information provides a blend of both the old and new. Our programs such as *So They Will Know My Wishes* and *Charlatans, Leeches, and Old Wives*, provide the patron the opportunity to receive face-to-face interaction where librarians listen, guide, and offer reliable health information. *Health Connect @ JCPL* links our patrons to the digital world of current, evidence-based health information. Together programs and digital content allow libraries to enhance the lives of their residents by providing a broad diversity of information to our patrons. With such a foundation, Johnson County Public Library is eager to learn and change along with the advances of technology.

Bio:



Scott received his MLS from Indiana University in 1973. He then became a children’s librarian at IMCPL from 1973-1980, then a medical librarian at St. John’s Hospital in Anderson until 2013. He has been an adult librarian at the

Trafalgar Branch of Johnson County Public Library since 2013. He plans to retire at the end of 2015. His proudest professional moments include Chair of St. John’s Ethics Advisory Committee for 12 years, Member of Oncology Clinical Rounds Team, and creator of Kevin’s Korner, a cancer patient/caregiver library in Madison County. He now resides in Bloomington, Ind.