

Health Sciences Library Closings: Overview and Background

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Many libraries across the United States have closed and other libraries are facing closure. A recent study of health sciences library closings [1] found that from 1989-2006 approximately 23-34% of U.S. health sciences libraries closed. Furthermore, between 2011 and 2015, 613 libraries closed, for an average of 115 closings per year [2]. But why? What was the rationale for these closings? Was the decision based solely on economic reasons, or were there other underlying factors? How will providers who lack library services fill their information needs and how can the closing of additional libraries be prevented?

A group of health sciences librarians, herein known as the Health Sciences Library Study Group (HSLSG) representing both academic and hospital librarians was informally organized in 2017 to address these issues. The HSLSG believes there is a lack of substantive data on why libraries are closing. Thus, during the 2018 annual meeting of the Medical Library Association (MLA) held in Atlanta, Georgia, the Hospital Libraries Section, and the Outreach and Marketing Special Interest Group organized a Special Content Session to share information, and gather ideas and information from interested MLA members.

The HSLSG's goal is to seek funding to conduct a comprehensive, substantive study to enable the healthcare community to understand why U.S. health sciences libraries are closing, and what the consequences of the closings will be. We also seek to prevent the closing of additional health sciences libraries. Some of the questions we hope to answer are:

1. Why are health sciences libraries being closed?
 - a. What was the rationale for the closing?
 - b. Was the decision based solely on economic reasons, or were there other underlying motives?
2. What will be the effect of closing libraries on healthcare providers, learners, and patients?
3. How will providers who lack library services fill their information needs?

Research Project Spotlight

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4. How are models of library services and medical information delivery evolving without a library?

The project's overarching goal will be to gather information to define a new strategic vision for the roles and responsibilities of the practicing health sciences librarian and build on the National Library of Medicine's Strategic Plan, 2017-2027. We are looking for people who can work with us on research, data analysis, and statistics.

To participate, please contact Angela Spencer, angela.spencer@stlukes-stl.com or angspencer730@gmail.com

Works cited

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2. Thibodeau PL, Funk CJ. Trends in hospital librarianship and hospital library services: 1989 to 2006. *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, 2009;97(4): 273. DOI: 10.3163%2F1536-5050.97.4.011.



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