A wise person once said, “It doesn’t matter how many resources you have; if you do not know how to use them, it will never be enough.” Do you have a clinical librarian on your team? Do you know how to utilize the skills and knowledge of the clinical librarian to support your patient care goals?

The Role of the Clinical Librarian
As the clinical librarian at a large Southwest teaching hospital, I provide information management tools and support clinical decision processes and research efforts by:

- Attending morning report,
- Rounding with clinical teams (when physicians are making rounds, questions are always raised),
- Closing the knowledge gap with the delivery of best-practices literature,
- Helping information users retrieve and manage relevant primary and secondary information for patient care and research,
- Providing filtered evidence-based medicine (EBM) information on demand that gives busy clinicians more time for patient care, and
- Being an information partner on research projects/teams.

History of the Clinical Librarian
In 1971, Gertrude Lamb, PhD, a medical librarian at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, decided to accompany students on medical rounds to see what the teaching was like. The attending physician noted how helpful it would be to test blood at the bedside so that clinicians could get immediate answers without having to wait for laboratory results. That statement prompted Lamb to consider the possibility of training information specialists to be present at the point of care, and thus the new role of the clinical librarian was conceived.¹

Unanswered Clinical Questions
Little is known about how often residents encounter unanswered clinical questions in their training. However, Michael L. Green, MD, of the Yale Primary Care Residency Program reports that residents frequently encounter new clinical questions in the outpatient clinic but infrequently answer them.²

In addition, the output of published clinical evidence—once a gentle trickle—has become a flood of information across a variety of online resources.

Having immediate access to the medical literature is important because questions arise at a rapid rate in clinical practice. Studies have shown that there are about five questions per physician per half day, of which about half go unanswered. As a member of your team, the clinical librarian can assist you with supportive information as you make challenging diagnoses. Noted authorities in the field of information science have pointed out that having a clinical librarian contribute to information-based medical care is equivalent to delivering EBM.³

From My Perspective as a Practicing Clinical Librarian
Residents look to their preceptors, their peers, or their favorite online resources (e.g. Google/Google Scholar, UpToDate) to find answers to clinical questions. These are popular and frequently used retrieval resources; however, there are other knowledge-based databases of equal, if not greater, importance. Chief among them are PubMed, Sum Search (SUMS), the Cochrane Library, DARE, and TRIP.

How many residents know that SUMS simultaneously searches for original studies, systematic reviews, and practice guidelines from multiple sources? It searches for studies that have been revised up to six times, while guidelines and systematic reviews may be revised once each. Results from PubMed, Dare, and the National Guideline Clearinghouse are merged and sorted. SUMS executes live searches of external websites in response to a query and is always up to date. It can challenge residents to expand their knowledge base and to explore other resources to find clinical answers. An aspect of my role is to share information retrieval and management with residents and faculty (http://sumsearch.org/).

Information management skills reach beyond EBM and coexist with health care policy and reimbursement. A recent study found that 51% of financial return came from more aggressive fee-for-service coding and more frequent use of higher-level primary care billing codes, which are supported by documentation that is more comprehensive.⁴ I suggest that comprehensive documentation presents itself as the answer to a clinical question that supports clinicians’ diagnosis and treatment plans, thus justifying aggressive coding. Citing EBM references in the medical record, be it electronic or paper, requires a combination of information management...
trieval skills and EBM that is critical to residents’ training experiences.

**Information Management: A Value-added Intervention**

As the clinical librarian, I support the research and patient care/safety efforts of residents and their preceptors, regardless of their information retrieval skills. Locating resources to close the knowledge gap of unanswered clinical questions adds to the knowledge base of the resident and the faculty. Thus, when a resident graduates from training, he/she will be better prepared to respond to a variety of issues, including health care reform, evolving payment models, and the transition from hospital-focused care to population health.

Information and knowledge management are at the heart of the health care worker’s professional, intellectual, and practical activities. Having the right information at the right time is an integral component of clinical decision making. Applying EBM to individual patients requires understanding the harms and benefits of care as demonstrated in the scientific literature and balancing individual patient data with sound clinical judgment. The clinical librarian can facilitate this process in teaching settings and at the bedside by removing barriers to accessing evidence-based resources, thereby contributing to a better patient outcome.

Do you have a clinical librarian on your team?

**References**