

MICHIGAN HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

CODE OF ETHICS

This Code of Ethics for the Michigan Health Sciences Libraries Association is intended to serve as a guideline addressing the following issues:

- a. the dignity of the profession
- b. providing service to the clientele
- c. committment to intellectual freedom
- d. responsibility to the library's sponsor
- e. upholding the truth
- f. responsibility to society

While there are no consequences for ignoring these guidelines, membership in the Association implies adherence to this code. The Association is judged by the integrity of its individual members.

The health sciences librarian has a professional obligation to engage in educational activities that contribute to professional growth, strengthen continuing education certification and academic preparation requirements, and raise the quality and credibility of the profession.

The librarian is responsible for using professional judgement on behalf of the broad clientele and should consider the needs and interest of the clientele above organizational or personal needs or interests.

The librarian is responsible for using professional experience and education to maintain and improve the library, library services, and environment in which they exist.

The librarian is responsible for providing access to information to all users and potential users of the library. Policies relating to the circulation and use of library materials must be fair, flexible, and designed to maximize access to information.

The librarian has the responsibility and obligation to maintain a collection of materials appropriate to the needs of the clientele. The librarian's attitude to clients should be one of courtesy and helpfulness. Communication skills should be used to determine the client's individual information needs. The librarian should refrain from the unauthorized practice of medicine or law.

The Health Sciences Librarian

- will write guidelines for the protection of a client's request for information and the librarian's response.
- will work with the Library's administration to develop guidelines for access to information in the Library.
- will protect the client's right to request information and have the request held confidential from any third party inquiry.

^{MHSLA}
The Medical Library Association is dedicated to improving health through the design, development, and management of information systems; the creation and monitoring of education programs and information services; and research in the Library Information profession. As a member of ^{MHSLA}MLA I adhere to/am obligated to follow/approve/uphold these professional obligations:

- to provide individuals or groups with the most current, accurate, and relevant health information, regardless of personal beliefs or the possible uses to which the information might be put.
- to protect the right of access to health information and the confidence and privacy of clients.
- to select and organize health information to support quality health care as defined by the mission of the institution.
- to advise myself and others:
 - a. to uphold the laws governing the creation, reproduction, and dissemination of health information
 - b. to avoid misrepresentation when gathering health information.
- to personally pursue and to encourage colleagues to pursue high standards of professional competence in the health information science.

18 December 1991 NJW

(cc:MLA news)



Ad Hoc Committee on Ethics

Affiliated Groups

- Flint Area Health Sciences Library Network
- Metropolitan Detroit Medical Library Group
- Mid-Michigan Health Sciences Libraries
- Northern Michigan Health Sciences Libraries Group
- Thumb Area Medical Information Consortium
- Upper Peninsula Health Science Libraries Consortium
- Valley Regional Health Science Librarians
- Western Michigan Health Sciences Libraries Association

Committee Members

Glenda Evans
Sandra Martin
Nancy Winslow, Chair

Charge

To write a code of ethics for the Michigan Health Sciences Libraries Association.

Activities

The Ethics Committee met at St. Lawrence Hospital on 10 May 1991. After much discussion (and coffee) we left with notes to compile and send to the Chair for compilation. This rough draft was to be presented to the Board at the June meeting. When the June meeting was cancelled, more revisions were made and a preliminary draft will presented at the MHS LA Board meeting 28 August 1991.

We plan to use Ethics Round Table Discussions at the October 1991 Educational Conference to enlarge on the draft and to present a first draft to the Board at the first meeting after 1 January 1992.

The Committee would like to thank Jane Claytor for meeting space (and coffee) and to our institutions for time allotted to work on this committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy J. Winslow, Chair

21 August 1991

TO: MHS LA BOARD MEMBERS
FROM: RIA LUKES
DATE: MARCH 1992
SUBJ: ETHICS STATEMENT

The ad-hoc Ethics Committee was appointed over a year ago in response to many concerns raised by MHS LA members about "ethical" behavior. During that time they have conducted a round table discussion and written a draft of an ethics statement. At the last Board meeting we agreed to send any comments to Nancy Winslow so she could complete a final draft of the document.

After taking a look at the ethics draft I asked myself why we were adopting a statement. At the April 7 Board meeting I plan on spending time discussing exactly why we want an ethics statement and what should be included. If you are an area representative please talk to persons from your area and find out what they expect.

Some questions to get you thinking!!!!

How specific should the statement be?

What problems arose that caused this statement to be necessary? Did this statement solve those problems?

Should there be consequences from the Association if a complaint is filed? If there are no consequences does there need to be a statement?

What happens when library ethics conflict with institutional needs?

Please take one more look at the ethics statement and talk to your local colleagues and become prepared to discuss what should be presented to the membership!

Thanks!

DRAFT
6/10/93

**Draft Code of Ethics
For
Health Sciences Librarians**

Preliminary Comments

It is important to consider the nature of what we mean by a code of ethics. Many of the difficulties we encounter with other codes of ethics is that they are not. Rather, they are an assortment of edicts and guidelines and random rules, which often tend to be diluted by exceptions and qualifying phrases. They seem to lack commitment.

A starting point for dealing with this involves the distinction between ethics and morality. Morality derives from the Latin word "moralis" which means "custom." Anthropologists and sociologists use the word "mores" which derives etymologically from that same Latin word. Morality and Mores refer to the principles and guidelines posited by custom (society, its institutions, legal system, traditions, etc.) governing behavior. As we all know, mores (customs, morality) differ, not only from one society to another, but also from one social group to another within the same society.

Ethics is often confused with morality, and the words are often used interchangeably. But in fact, ethics means something a little different. Ethics derives etymologically from the Greek "ethikos." The word became the Latin "ethice" and expressed a different concept from "moralis." Ethics involves the essential distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous behavior, etc. Ethics has to do with basic principles of duty, obligation, and responsibility. Ethics transcends morality; morality is a part of ethics, but they also sometimes conflict. Ethics refers to more universal and timeless principles.

The distinction between ethics and morality is subtle, but important in drafting a code of ethics. It is, in fact, central to our task of devising a code of ethics. A code of ethics should not be merely a random list of rules. It should be a statement of ideals. It should state unambiguously and without reservation what those ideals are. And it transcends divergent institutional guidelines, social conventions, differing mores, traditions and customs.

A code of ethics is one of the most important documents of any profession. The word profession means to publicly declare a belief, to commit to certain ideals, to adopt certain values, to dedicate oneself to certain ideals. A code of ethics, then, becomes a public espousal of ideals and a commitment to achieve them. It is the touchstone of a profession.

It is not, or should not be, a listing of specific activities, but a statement of general guiding principles.

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It is also important to understand that ethics involves relationships with others. In isolation, for a person on some deserted island, ethics is pretty much meaningless. A code of ethics defines relationships of a profession and its practitioners. It establishes responsibilities and obligations to others. It should, thus, address such basic questions as: "To whom do we have responsibilities and obligations as a profession?" and "What do these responsibilities and obligations entail?"

There are three essential points to be made here:

1. A code of ethics should be a statement of principles, a declaration of ideals;
2. Aspirations and ideals transcend the practices of individuals or institutions; and
3. A code of ethics should identify those to whom the professionals have responsibilities and what those responsibilities consist of.

Since the essence of the health sciences library profession is education and service to others, the Task Force has set the framework for the Code of Ethics on the health sciences librarian's responsibilities to oneself, clients, colleagues, the profession, the institution, the state, and to society. Under each group, a broad ethical goal is given and the goal implies certain behaviors that are listed and numbered.

The open forum at the 1993 MLA Annual Meeting was the first opportunity for the membership of MLA to review the draft code. The chapter meetings in the fall offer another opportunity for it to be reviewed and the draft code will appear on the MEDLIB LISTSERV. The Board of Directors will discuss it at its February 1994 meeting. The Task Force plans to present a final copy to the membership at the 1994 annual meeting.

Task Force Members:

Marjorie Anderson
David King
Carolyn Lipscomb
Katherine Lindner
Scott Plutchak
Richard Lyders, Chairman
Carla Funk, MLA Liaison

**Draft Code of Ethics
For
Health Sciences Librarians**

Goals and Principles for Ethical Conduct

As a member of the profession, the Health Sciences Librarian believes that knowledge is the sine qua non of informed decisions in health care, education, and research and that the Health Sciences Librarian serves society by assuring that informed health care decisions can be made.

The Health Sciences Librarian has a responsibility to each of the following areas and, within each area, to the goal and principles stated:

1. ONESELF

Goal: To assume personal responsibility for developing and maintaining one's own professional excellence.

To that end, the Health Sciences Librarian will:

- 1.1 Maintain high standards of professional conduct.
- 1.2 Be actively involved in service to the profession.
- 1.3 Design and implement a plan for continuing professional development.
- 1.4 Collaborate to enhance the profession.

2. CLIENTS

Goal: To assure that the information needs of the client are met.

To that end, the Health Sciences Librarian will:

- 2.1 Respect equally the information needs of all clients.
- 2.2 Respect the privacy of clients and protect the confidentiality of the client relationships.
- 2.3 Advocate access to health information for all.

- 2.4 Assure that fees are commensurate with services performed and consistent with the clients' ability to pay.
- 2.5 Exercise professional judgment to assure that the best possible information available is provided.

3. COLLEAGUES

Goal: To assure the fulfillment of the professional aspirations of all colleagues.

To that end the Health Sciences Librarian will:

- 3.1 Support the fulfillment of the professional aspirations of colleagues.
- 3.2 Treat colleagues with the respect due them as equal members of the profession.
- 3.3 Share professional expertise and knowledge.

4. THE PROFESSION

Goal: To uphold the philosophy and ideals of the profession.

To that end the Health Sciences Librarian will:

- 4.1 Contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.
- 4.2 Advocate the values and standards of the profession.
- 4.3 Recognize and condemn unethical conduct.
- 4.4 Encourage the best and brightest to join the profession.

5. THE INSTITUTION

Goal: To advance the mission of the institution.

To that end the Health Sciences Librarian will:

- 5.1 Participate in the institutional planning process.

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- 5.2 Exercise responsible management of institutional resources.
- 5.3 Demonstrate the essential value of library services in meeting the information needs of the institution.

6. THE STATE

Goal: To advance laws and policies that promote informed health care decisions.

To that end the Health Sciences Librarian will:

- 6.1 Support legislative initiatives that politically impact informed health care decisions and oppose those that impede this process.
- 6.2 Contribute knowledge and expertise in the formation of public policy.

7. SOCIETY

Goal: To create and maintain conditions of freedom of inquiry, thought and expression under which scholarship can exist.

To that end Health Sciences Librarians will:

- 7.1 Design, develop, and manage effective information systems that support freedom of inquiry, thought and expression.
- 7.2 Create and provide effective education programs and information services.
- 7.3 Recognize the value of information and balance the intellectual property rights of authors, publishers and users.