

SEAMIC Travel Research Fellowship Program 1990

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Abstrak: Program SEAMIC Travel Research Fellowship dimulakan pada tahun 1978 oleh SEAMIC/IMEJ. Laporan ini ialah rakaman pemerhatian penulis mengenai lawatan beliau ke beberapa buah perpustakaan perubatan di Singapura, Indonesia, Thailand dan Jepun di bawah Program tersebut.

Abstract: The SEAMIC Travel Research Fellowship (TRF) Program was initiated in 1978 by SEAMIC/IMEJ. In this report, the writer recounts her observations of her visits to a number of medical libraries in Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan under this program.

TRF Program

The SEAMIC Travel Research Fellowship (TRF) Program was initiated in 1978 by SEAMIC/IMEJ.¹ The purpose of the TRF Program is to provide middle-level researchers, technicians and librarians of SEAMIC member countries who are engaged in health-related activities, with the opportunities to visit other SEAMIC countries for comparative studies on specific studies related to their research or work. Recipients of the TRF Program can select from two programmes, one involving visits to three countries for comparative study, the other concentrating on research in a single institution in a member country. The final week of both programmes is spent in Japan, where recipients study and observe the situation in Japan and then prepare a report of their research for submission to SEAMIC/IMEJ.

Research Topic

The topic selected for the author's TRF Program was *Computerisation of medical library and information services in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan*. The research was to be conducted during November 1990. The research topic was chosen as the writer wanted to know how other medical libraries were coping with the new information technologies. The timing of the award was also right since the Medical Library, University of Malaya, has recently acquired **MEDLINE** and **PDQ / Cancerlit** on CD-ROM, and is also a depository library for **Popline**, a database produced by the Population Information Program, John Hopkins University. The

University of Malaya Library System was also about to launch into the ATLAS Library Automation System, and the Medical Library, as part of the Library System, would adopt the same software package. The purpose of the TRF was, then, to see what other medical libraries in this region have done and how they have used the new technologies to improve and provide new services to their users.

Research Procedures

In each country, visits to a number of medical libraries were arranged by the coordinating SEAMIC library.² During these visits, the writer met and discussed with the chief librarian or the director concerning the overall policy of computerisation of their library or institution. This would be followed by a general tour of the library. Later, more time would be spent in the reference and information service divisions. The author had found that fellow librarians were very cooperative and readily share their knowledge and experiences with her. Language barriers did not prevent Thai and Japanese librarians from trying their level best to communicate with her.

Observations

In all the libraries visited, it was observed that, in general, librarians welcome the new technologies that are making a tremendous impact on the library and information world. Many of the medical libraries are already making use of computers and the new technologies to provide new services to their readers.

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In Singapore and Thailand, the medical school librarians are also working with the academic staff to extend library services beyond the traditional confines of the library. For example, at the University of Chulalongkorn, one of the lecturers wrote a programme for the Medical Library to enable it to extend its CD-ROM services to the lecturers outside the Library's opening hours.

In Singapore, the libraries visited are fully computerised. The libraries of the National University of Singapore, the Institute of Education, the Ngee Ann Polytechnic and the Nanyang Technological Institute have been running their libraries on integrated computer systems for some time. Library staff and users are also familiar and comfortable with the new information technology. Funding does not appear to be a problem in Singapore and libraries are encouraged and motivated to adopt the new technologies by their administrative authorities. The Medical Library, National University of Singapore is the only medical library in the country and enjoys all the privileges as well as the responsibilities of providing the information needs of all health professionals on the island. It is well endowed and has an almost unlimited acquisition budget.

Thailand follows closely among the SEAMIC countries in the use of computers and other technologies for its medical libraries. The Mahidol University has the largest medical library collections in the country. The Mahidol University Library and Information Center has its origin from the Siriraj Medical Library, but it has since developed into a network of 15 libraries, out of which eleven are medical or health-related. The Thai Ministry of Science is also actively encouraging Thai researchers and scientists to make use of the new information technology by the provision of online search services via TIAC (Technical Information Access Center). This service began in 1990 and for this first year, requestors must access the TIAC in a library and had only to pay 100 bahts for each request. However, from 1991 this service may also be accessed directly from the user's home or office.

Indonesian libraries, on the other hand, are handicapped by severe financial problems, so much so that they have very little funds for even basic textbooks. They depend much on donations from SEAMIC or other international bodies. The development of library collections or the planning of new services are thus badly affected. Many medical library collections are small and outdated, and kept in closed access because of the severe shortage of books. The libraries

visited by the writer used the computers that were donated to them mainly for indexing and for specific bibliographical projects.

In Japan, computers are used by most of the medical libraries for cataloguing, monograph and serial acquisitions, circulation, online terminals and information retrieval. Since 1976, Japanese medical libraries can access foreign databases including MEDLINE and EMBASE via JICST (Japan Information Center of Science and Technology). JICST is the central organisation of information activities in Japan for science and technology which was established by a legislative act of 1957. Besides offering such services as online database services, publications, photocopying, translations and literature search services, JICST's main work is the construction of bibliographic databases. About 100 information specialists in every field of science and technology are recruited to abstract relevant articles in almost all languages to be input into these databases which are then made easily accessible to researchers through JOIS (JICST Online Information System). This easy availability and accessibility of information may be an important contribution to the tremendous growth of scientific and technological knowledge and expertise in Japan. The visit to the Medical Library, Kyushu University which also served as the SEAMIC Photocopying Center, was very rewarding as the author was able to meet with the librarians who work so hard and efficiently to supply our photocopy needs.³

Conclusion

Medical libraries in the SEAMIC countries and in Japan are quick to exploit the potentialities of computers and the new technologies to improve their library services and operations. However, much depends on the availability of funds and the support of the government.

The author was very privileged to be the first librarian to participate in the TRF Program. It was an eye-opener, and a rewarding experience to visit some of the major medical libraries in Jakarta, Bangkok and Fukuoka. The opportunities provided by the TRF Program to meet and talk shop as well as socialise with fellow medical librarians is very much appreciated. It is hoped that the dialogues initiated during these visits would be sustained and, hopefully, result in greater interlibrary cooperation between medical libraries in the SEAMIC region.

Footnotes

- ¹ The International Medical Foundation Of Japan (IMFJ) was established in August 1967 under the joint jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, with the aim of promoting Japan's official programmes of medical cooperation with developing countries. As one of its main projects to achieve this objective, the Southeast Asian Medical Information Center (SEAMIC) was set up to help to promote the improvement of public health administration, research, technological development and personnel training through the generation and exchange of health and medical information. The present SEAMIC countries are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Japan.
- ² List of organisations and persons visited is given in **Appendix I**
- ³ One of the most valued SEAMIC service is its photocopy service. On request from libraries in SEAMIC countries, photocopies of articles appearing in medical journals kept by Japanese libraries are processed and sent to requesting libraries free of charge. The Kyushu University Medical Library acts as the coordinating centre for such requests.

APPENDIX I	
Names of Organisations/Persons Visited	
Libraries	Persons-in-charge
1. Singapore	
a. Medical Library, National University of Singapore	Miss Wee Joo Gim
b. Institute of Education*	Mr. Ng Soo Kwee
c. Ngee Ann Polytechnic	Mrs. Lock Thi Xuan
d. Nanyang Technological Institute*	Mr. Lim Hong Too
2. Indonesia	
a. Faculty of Medicine, University of Indonesia	Miss Sri Soenarni
b. Faculty of Public Health, University of Indonesia	Mrs. Winda H. Koesoebjono
c. National Institute of Health Research and Development	Mrs. Pudjiharti
d. Health Data Library, Ministry of Health	Mrs. Herawati
e. Medical Library, YARSI University	Miss Sri Soenarni
3. Thailand	
a. Library and Information Center, Mahidol University	Mrs. Vipa Goysookho
b. Faculty of Medicine, Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University	Mrs. Kannike Cholumpee
c. Faculty of Medicine, Ramathibothi Hospital, Mahidol University	Mrs. Achara Saengdeejing
d. Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University	Mrs. Chira Intakosum
e. Thai Population Centre	Miss Jantarat Rabiablok
f. Ministry of Public Health	Miss Jirapan Sangsastra
4. Japan	
a. Medical Library, Kyushu University	Mr. Hajime Asakura
b. Japan Information Center for Science and Technology (Kyushu Branch)	Mr. Hashimoto

* From 1st July 1991, the Institute of Education and the Nanyang Technological Institute merged to form the Nanyang Technological University.