



Bridging The Gap: The Critical Role of Librarians in Reducing Health Disparities

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Librarians have various opportunities to be part of interventions and educational programming to reduce health disparities whether it be through community health initiatives or training the next generation of medical professionals to be social justice advocates.

Objective

Apply a critical theory framework as it relates to the health sciences, particularly addressing the role of the librarian in reducing health and health care disparities.

Background

- Health Disparities are gaps in the quality of health among vulnerable populations as it relates to access to care, treatment, and outcomes.
- Addressing disparities is encouraged through effective interventions and programs.
- Research has shown that sociocultural differences between patient and provider influence communication and clinical decision-making.
- Despite providing quality care, it cannot compensate for decades of factors associated with barriers to care.

Methods

As a current library and information science student, I explored opportunities for health science librarians to be engaged and active in reducing health disparities through community initiatives, medical education instruction, and in clinical settings.



Community Initiatives

- Promote health literacy and community well-being through public libraries with on-going collaborations between medical and healthcare organizations.
- Increase academic partnerships to support specialized trainings and development of on-site programming.
- Community-based participatory efforts to guide information literacy programming to reduce knowledge gaps.



Medical Education

- Activities based on building skills that students can apply and transfer beyond the classroom and over their career.
- Go beyond cultural competency to consider issues of power and privilege, difference, and identity.
- Recognize and appropriately address biases in healthcare delivery.
- Examine race and class bias, especially as they manifest in the culture of medicine.



Critical Reflection

- Use information as a tool to combat stereotypes and bias by offering a more humanistic view.
- Turn education into a dialogue for self-reflection and critical thinking.
- Partner with faculty to create learning spaces and experiences to offer an interdisciplinary approach to understanding social issues in medicine.

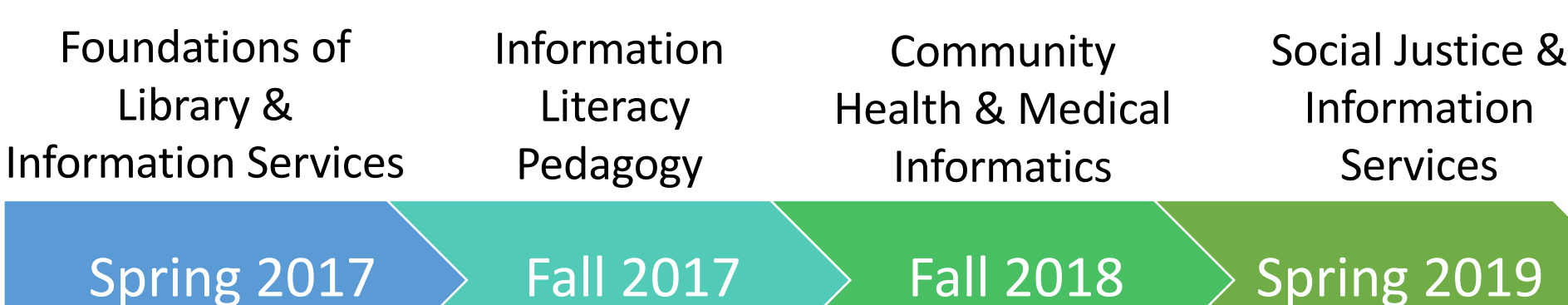


Patient Care

- Implement solutions for digital health literacy and electronic information system design.
- Embed consumer health librarians in the shared decision-making model. Partner with clinicians to deliver “Information Prescription Service” to help patients retrieve and identify quality information.
- Work with patient navigators to promote consumer health resources and integrate information guides within the patient portal system.

Medical Humanities

- Use art and literature to assist in viewing issues from more than one perspective.
- Understand diverse values and beliefs in order to acknowledge patient needs in a system of power and privilege.
- Supplements practice-based learning with traditional courses to include human sensibility, patient communication, and medical ethics.
- Using critical and cultural theory in medical humanities enhances the intellectual as well as the “real world” impact of interrogation of medicine, health, and illness.



Acknowledgments: Gina Macaluso, Nicole Pagowsky, Ashley Gohr, Marti Lindsey

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