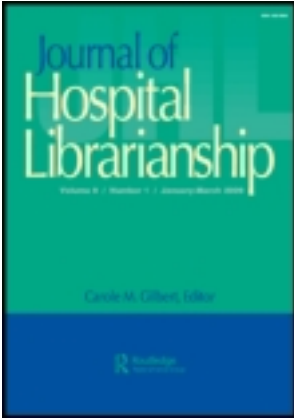


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Thirty-Five Years and Counting BQSI/MB Formula for Success: Cooperation, Education and Resource Sharing

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In 2010, the Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Manhattan and the Bronx Health Sciences Librarians (BQSI/MB) celebrated its 35th anniversary. Over the years this organization has grown from a small group of hospital librarians to a much larger one that now includes medical librarians representing all types of institutions from all five boroughs of New York City. Along the way, the group met new challenges and achieved many goals. This article summarizes some key BQSI/MB experiences and achievements that may be of help to those in other library consortia.

KEYWORDS *continuing education, cooperative purchasing, library consortia, networks, professional development*

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BEGINNINGS

By the mid-1970s, library cooperatives and networks had made significant impact in the delivery of services both to each other and their end-users. In the New York area especially, a long history of cooperation between health sciences libraries had helped to bring about The Medical Library Center of New York (MLCNY) in 1959, The Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO) in 1964, and other more focused groups, including the Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Manhattan and the Bronx Health Sciences Librarians (BQSI/MB) in 1975 (1). As noted in Jacqueline Felter's Janet Doe Lecture of 1974, library cooperatives and cooperatives of cooperatives proliferated because joint action on common issues was more effective than individual action—"by looking to groups for ideas about solutions to common problems, goals could be achieved" (2).

The official year of BQSI/MB's founding is 1975, though the project began much earlier with the original idea to form a consortium for free interlibrary loan cooperation. By 1968, there were several local library organizations providing free interchange of interlibrary loans, including the Health Information Libraries of Westchester (HILOW, 1965); Long Island Library Resources Council (LILRC, 1966); MLCNY and METRO—though both were member based; and the SUNY Downstate Medical Center Library, that offered hospital libraries in Brooklyn and Long Island free interlibrary loans on an experimental basis (3).

At the suggestion of the members of the New York Regional Group of the Medical Library Association (MLA), a group of hospital librarians met in May 1968 at City Hospital Center at Elmhurst (4). This was the beginning of what would be called the "Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island Health Sciences Library Group" (BQSI). The goal of the founders was to enhance the value of services provided by the member librarians through the sharing of resources via interlibrary loan. The founder librarians met several more times but it was several years before the consortium was officially organized. Meeting in May 1975, the Steering Committee worked to establish the group's mission, aims, and goals that would guide a consortium whose members would share resources such as reference and holdings lists and exchange free interlibrary loans. It was decided that membership would be defined quite liberally. Any medical librarian from the geographic area "*actively interested in providing professional library and information services to health professionals*" could be a member (5). It should be noted that a key difference between BQSI and other consortia was and is that each librarian joins on a personal membership basis—there are no institutional members. The bylaws were drafted and approved and the group was officially in business:

... The purpose of the Brooklyn, Queens and State Island Health Sciences Library Group is to bring together persons of this constituted geographic

area, engaged in health science library services for the following purposes: for furthering their specialized knowledge, for exchange of information, for improvement and development of resources, for identifying special needs, for making known the needs of the group to the New York Regional Group/Medical Library Association and for coordinating all library services and activities with existing area groups, libraries and programs (6).

There were 25 members in the group at that time and Mary Buchheit (Kingsbrook Jewish Hospital, Brooklyn) was the group's first president. Since then, 18 presidents have led the group and the membership now stands at 49 individual and emeritus members (7).

BORDERS EXPAND

From the beginning, the BQSI members were committed to providing shared resources, with Lydia Friedman (Maimonides Hospital, Brooklyn) chairing the Sharing Resources Committee and coordinating the group's interlibrary loan activities for many years. Since most members worked for hospital libraries, they were able to use the exchange of free interlibrary loans for their own benefit and the benefit of their end-users. Members met twice a year to discuss various issues of interest to librarians and to hear presentations on medical library-related topics (Figure 1). Although remaining a small group, BQSI was able to serve as an important resource for area hospital librarians by sharing resources, education and networking.



FIGURE 1 BQSI/MB members at the Spring 1997 meeting at Catholic Medical Center, Queens. *Left to right:* Raja Jayatilleke (College of Staten Island), Lucy DiMatteo (St. Vincent's Medical Center of Richmond), Narciso Rodriguez (Brooklyn Hospital Center), Lydia Friedman (Maimonides Medical Center), and George Wahlert (Long Island College Hospital).

However, the library world continued to change. Thanks to the success that BQSI had with developing a free interlibrary loan exchange, the group was joined by the Medical and Scientific Libraries of Long Island (MEDLI) to create a network for interconsortia lending. At the same time, the Consortium for Health Information (CHI) in Pennsylvania and Health Sciences Library Association of New Jersey (HSLANJ) were looking to achieve this same goal for their members. Thanks to the strong organizational efforts of Lydia Friedman and other librarians, these groups were able to band together to form the Basic Health Sciences Library Network (BHSL) in 1968 (8). As a network of library consortia that include academic, society, nursing, and health science libraries within New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, BHSL was created to increase free reciprocal interlibrary loans for libraries within these states. The goal was not to increase the volume of loans being made but rather increasing the number of free interlibrary loans. BQSI members were now able to receive free interlibrary loans from 132 additional libraries that grew to 460 BHSL libraries by 1988.

There were even more changes within the BQSI community. Some hospitals and health groups had closed their libraries or were closing entirely; over its first two decades nearly half of its 37 members left the group. Yet, by the fall of 2003 with the closing of Medical Library Center of New York (MLCNY) and the disbanding of the Manhattan-Bronx Librarians Group, libraries from Manhattan and the Bronx were looking for ways to cooperate and expressed interest in joining BQSI (Figure 2). Since the new membership no longer strictly reflected the original geographic area and following a vigorous discussion by the membership, new members were welcomed into the group and “Manhattan and the Bronx” (MB) was added to the organization’s name. Thus the “Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Manhattan and the Bronx Health Sciences Librarians” (BQSI/MB) group was born.

Besides a name change, it became clear to the membership that the group faced many new challenges: to stay current in a fast changing

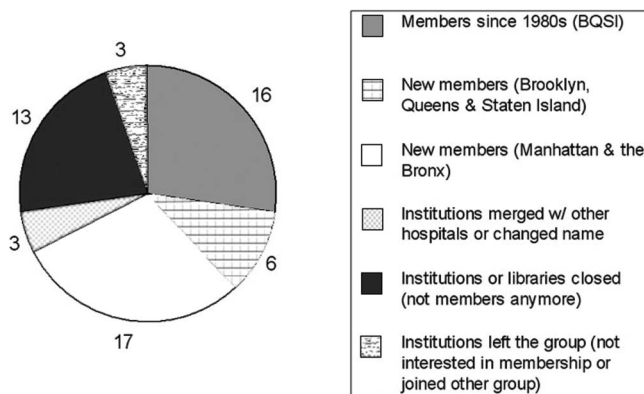


FIGURE 2 Changes in BQSI Membership during the last three decades.

technology environment; to continue to fulfill the original mission to serve as a leading resource for professional education, advocacy and networking; and to provide real help for its members. To meet these challenges, BQSI/MB had to search for new forums and embrace new activities.

DO WE NEED A WEB SITE?

For a long time the consortium published a newsletter (George Wahlert, Long Island College Hospital, remained for many years not only the editor but main writer and illustrator), and along with meetings and informal contacts, this was the main method of communication between members. In 2001 a big change came—BQSI members agreed that the group needed a Web site to improve communication and give the consortium more publicity. The Web site concept was first presented by Luda Dolinsky (Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn) and she then developed the site and remained the group's webmaster until 2008.

Ms. Dolinsky recalls that she had just created her first Web site for the Lutheran Medical Center Health Sciences Library in 1999, and thought this would be a great application for the group. In 2001 she presented this proposal to the BQSI Board and questions ranged from "Do we really need it?" to "It would be nice but who's going to do this?" To the last question she replied "I will" since she was enthusiastic about creating a Web site and was sure that the site was a "must" for BQSI. She convinced everyone that the Web site would help members communicate with each other and manage the group business in a modern efficient way; a Web site would allow members to easily find and share information, news and ideas, inform members about meetings, keep the directory updated, etc. Ms. Dolinsky assured the Board that the fees for Web site hosting would be as low as \$24 per year and the Board voted in favor of creating the first BQSI Web site.

During the next several months, Ms. Dolinsky developed the site. Her experience working as a webmaster was described in an article published in the *NY/NJ MLA Chapter Newsletter* (9). She also started the first BQSI e-mail list. Since then the Web site has developed into a fully functional, frequently updated site while retaining much of the original design. Costs have remained low, though charges for hosting the site have risen slightly. All updates, new developments, changes in design, etc., are done by BQSI/MB webmaster with no financial or technical assistance from the outside. After Ms. Dolinsky relocated, Yelena Friedman (Staten Island University Hospital) took over the task of webmaster. Today BQSI/MB has gone "green," with practically all communications, updates, surveys, etc., done via the Web site and e-mail list. The site holds the group's historical page and photo archive, serves as a repository for past presentations, and collects various materials to help members in their everyday tasks. The latest project is developing a

section to present members' profiles in order to assist them in promoting their work and presenting their achievements. The goal is to keep the Web site dynamic and useful, making it a working tool for all members.

FOCUS ON CONTINUING EDUCATION

Since most BQSI/MB librarians manage small one- to three-person hospital libraries and have very limited resources, members depend on the group for their continuing education (CE) programs. As new technologies, initiatives, and resources emerge, hospital librarians are often the first in their institutions to learn of them through library and medical literature; they are dependent on benchmarking and networking with colleagues as the world of knowledge-based information resources expands. This is why continuing education has long been an important function of BQSI/MB's mission. Since its conception BQSI/MB has provided a strong network of librarians working together—teaching, learning, growing—to become a powerful resource for the hospital librarian (10).

This mission has provided the opportunity for members or guest speakers who had a particular specialty or creative insight to provide their experiences and personal knowledge as a learning opportunity for meeting attendees. As noted below, the emphasis was later changed to bring in first-rate specialists to enhance the learning experience for all members. The cooperation between members and the opening of their facilities for meetings continues to provide an avenue for learning and benchmarking and enables members to see first hand a wide variety of library layouts, equipment, and collections (Figure 3).

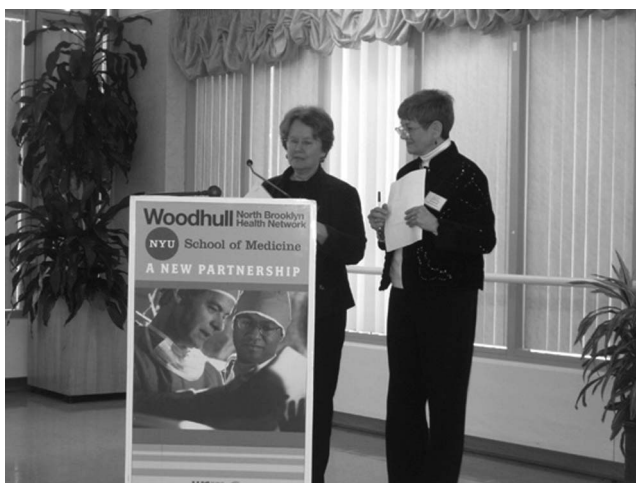


FIGURE 3 BQSI/MB meeting in Fall 2009 at the Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center, Brooklyn. Laraine Tursi, BQSI/MB President (on the right) presents Kate Oliver from NN/LM-MARL.

Starting in 2006 the Program Planning Committee decided to try inviting vendors to present their products during meetings. Since members often cannot attend regional or national library conferences where they can visit vendor exhibits, this allows members to meet with vendors and obtain information on new products and services. The Committee ensures that vendor presentations not only inform attendees about products but also give insight on how the product relates to other publications and databases in the field. BQSI/MB members have recently learned about DynaMed, AccessSurgery and AccessEmergency Medicine, Stat!Ref, Exam Master, Cardiosource Plus, and Nursing@OVID.

Also in 2006 BQSI/MB started to provide members with the opportunity to earn CE credits for courses presented during group meetings. As hospital library budgets shrink, libraries are often unable to find budget dollars for continuing education. For this reason, the BQSI/MB Board agreed that the group would provide more educational activities for members at minimal or no cost. The Board thanks the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Middle Atlantic Regional Medical Libraries (MARL), Medical Library Association (MLA), New York/New Jersey Chapter of MLA (NY/NJ MLA), and the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO) for support in this very important initiative. The first class was organized by Yelena Friedman at the Fall 2006 meeting. "Getting Scholarly Resources into the Hospital Environment: From Print to Digital" was presented by Judith S. Cohn, Associate Vice President for Scholarly Information/University Librarian, UMDNJ. This up-to-date presentation made the class a great success.

Another recent educational project provided new learning opportunities for members by organizing hands-on workshops that allowed members to learn some practical skills they could take back to their libraries. METRO contributed to this initiative by offering their computer room for attendees. The first program was a series of two workshops on the basics of Photoshop that taught introductory graphic and Web site design skills. This was a fee-based workshop to pay the instructor's fee, but costs were kept low thanks to the free room and handouts. All handouts from this and other educational programs are posted on the BQSI/MB Web site for all members to use.

For the last few years, Laraine Tursi (Coney Island Hospital, Brooklyn) has been in charge of planning and coordinating the group's meetings and CE programs. This is how she describes her experience:

Generally to select a topic we monitor our support Web sites, current events, updates, listservs, and canvas our Board and committee chairs to gauge interest in a topic. Then we proceed with setting up logistics for the program that includes speakers, location, date, meals, sponsorships and promotion of the event. This planning can take 4–8 months depending on the program. We are fortunate that the NN/LM-MARL over the years has provided us with CE programs, PubMed and DOCLINE updates, as well as

information on copyright laws, institutional licensing and contracts plus much more—just for the asking. Webinar programs sponsored by MARL have provided us with additional venues for learning that is invaluable. These programs can be accessed from our desktop computers and allow for both learning and interaction for the “virtual” participants.

Recently, two programs generated a great deal of interest and response from the membership. Following the NN/LM-MidContinental Region’s introduction of the *Valuing Library Services Calculator* (11), the Program Committee invited Carolyn Anne Reid (Loeb Librarian, Wood Library, Weill Cornell Medical College) to present, along with a panel of BQSI/MB members, a discussion of the value of library services to an institution and the use of *return on investment* to demonstrate to administrators the importance of an on-site library on an actual cost basis. This meeting was held jointly with colleagues from the Medical and Scientific Libraries of Long Island (MEDLI) group.

Getting Magnetized: Search and Research Strategies for Nursing Excellence was the MLA CE class selected for the Spring 2010 meeting. Added to the usual logistics were speaker’s costs and fees that included travel and accommodations. The group applied for and was awarded a NN/LM-MARL Small Project Grant that supported the speaker’s costs of this continuing education initiative. William Self (Lenox Hill Hospital, Manhattan) arranged for the hospital to provide lecture hall space, and breakfast and lunch were sponsored by vendors. This program was attended by nearly every member and was very well received.

Our latest CE program took place last fall. Thanks to the outreach of MEDLI, we cosponsored a “mini-med school.” Associated with such a complex program were higher costs that included speakers and venue charges. MEDLI successfully applied for the NN/LM-MARL Small Project Grant that covered the costs of the program excluding the site. Queens College Library was selected as the site because of its mutually convenient location. Both consortia shared the final costs for this venue.

BQSI/MB has been very fortunate over the years to have created a lasting tradition of continuing professional education. The BQSI/MB librarians recognize the value of keeping up to date and through their interaction and cooperation, BQSI/MB has been able to provide this value-added benefit. In the end, communicating with colleagues on a regular basis is the group’s most valuable educational resource and the key to providing continuing professional development (12).

NEXT STEP: COLLECTIVE PURCHASING

As BQSI/MB looked for ways to increase benefits of consortia membership, it paid attention to one more important area of library cooperation: collective purchasing.

In the 1990s, the idea of collective or cooperative purchasing spread among libraries and especially health sciences libraries. Along with inter-library loans, union catalogs, and sharing resources, collective purchasing became another example of libraries banding together for both increased availability of resources and economics (13). However, at this point, these agreements were mainly the bundling together of consortia members' print subscriptions to achieve cost savings or a single-institution purchase of print journals and texts to be made available to network members via interlibrary loan.

With the coming of the new century, electronic resources and editions of journals outpaced their print counterparts in importance, availability, and usage. Early on the cost-impact factor was such that these resources were mostly located within the academic medical library setting; access by other libraries was dependent on affiliation or library-to-library agreements. As responsibility for providing these resources to end-users shifted to the hospital library setting, BQSI/MB members recognized that without lower costs they would be unable to make these important research tools available to their hospital staff.

In 2006, BQSI/MB established the Cooperative Purchasing Committee to investigate and negotiate purchasing agreements with vendors on behalf of the group. In a report to the membership, Gail Hendler (Lenox Hill Hospital, Manhattan), Committee Chair, announced that an early trial of AccessSurgery was a success and that 15 member libraries agreed to pursue a joint subscription. An agreement was successfully negotiated with McGraw-Hill and METRO's Health Library Services Program (HSLP) agreed to be responsible for invoice and receiving payments for the first 5 years on behalf of the subscribers.

Made of up at least three members, the Committee reviews both vendor offerings and member suggestions. If the Committee determines that a resource would be of interest and benefit to the group, it negotiates a trial of the resource and, with sufficient member commitments, works with the vendor on a suitable pricing algorithm. As of today, BQSI/MB has two contracts in place: Cardiosource Plus from the American College of Cardiology and McGraw-Hill's AccessSurgery and AccessEmergency-Medicine.

Whereas the Cardiosource contract is for a single discounted resource billed directly, McGraw-Hill offers an umbrella contract covering all of their Access databases and also includes JAMAevidence, USMLEasy, and OMMBID. Currently the AccessSurgery and AccessEmergency-Medicine online resources, purchased by the membership, are billed equally for the shared cost. Because these are cooperative purchases, members have the benefit of purchasing a resource at a reduced cost but have the responsibility of ensuring timely payments; if one institution delays payment all institutions will be locked out and denied access. The Committee is currently reviewing the other products offered under this contract for possible trials and subscriptions. During the past few years, the Committee has reviewed

and sponsored trials of a number of resources including DynaMed, OVID's Clin-eguide, PubsHub, and VisualDX.

In addition, BQSI/MB is looking at expanding group purchasing opportunities by affiliating with other library consortia. As Committee Chair in 2009, Debra Bonelli (St. Barnabas Hospital, the Bronx) approached the New Jersey Hospital Association (NJHA). The NJHA has a dynamic and well-established purchasing group that benefits a large number of libraries in New Jersey as well as Pennsylvania and Delaware. The Committee and Board will be looking at requesting membership in NJHA as an out-of-state consortium. This new direction holds great promise by giving the BQSI/MB membership the opportunity to improve and increase their libraries' resources while reducing costs.

CONCLUSION

The history of BQSI/MB has now covered different generations of health science librarians and a changed (and still changing) practice of librarianship. From its very beginning, the librarians who formed BQSI/MB were in the forefront of using the consortia for resource sharing and outreach. This outreach continues and has grown to include not only resources but also benchmarking, professional development, and cooperative purchasing.

It is a touchstone for BQSI/MB that membership in the consortia is a personal one. And because consortia activities are on a cost-recovery basis or paid with grants and operating costs are negligible, the group is able to keep dues low so that every member can afford to pay even without the support from their institution. It is through friendships and a sense of community that the group has been able to grow and evolve. Members are there for support, encouragement, and mentorship. Mindful of emerging needs of end-users and new technologies available for libraries to meet them, BQSI/MB members are there for each other to encourage, embrace, and welcome these changes and meet new goals by recognizing and solving these challenges.

In the end, creating and growing organically by uniting like-minded librarians in purpose and goals has allowed BQSI/MB to be an organization that has succeeded and will succeed in the future.

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