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# VA LIBRARY SERVICE THREE-DIMENSIONAL

*by*

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From ancient times to our own day, a golden thread of respect for books and the wisdom they contain has remained unbroken. Civilizations have perished, but books somehow have been preserved and libraries have continued to exist.

Years ago when a patient was hospitalized, his physical needs were supplied, but he was left alone to curse his luck or to feel sorry for himself. Today, in our modern hospitals, his mental and spiritual needs are provided for as well. If no library service is maintained by the hospital, a branch of the public library usually furnishes this service. In the Veterans Administration hospitals, regardless of size or type, library service is provided.

During World War I the American Library Association — at the request of the U. S. Government — established the Library War Service to provide reading and library service to fighting men in the United States and overseas. The male librarians in the camps, and those men who acted as librarians, sent books to the local base hospitals

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**BOOKS FOR PATIENTS**—Shown above is a part of the book collection at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Salisbury. Patients confined to their rooms have books brought to them upon request.

when this seemed advisable. These books were distributed by personnel on duty — either the chaplains or the Red Cross. At that time, permitting a woman librarian in a camp library was unheard of, but by February 1918, ALA had taken the necessary steps to obtain authorization for women librarians to work in base hospitals. By 1921, this work was taken over by the Public Health Service. The Executive Order of May 1, 1922 called for another transfer, this time to the Veterans Bureau, and it included 32 librarians in a camp field who proceeded with their hospital work as before.

The American Library Association sponsored this service until 1923 when the Veterans Bureau assumed the responsibility. In 1930 the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the Bureau of Pensions, and the Veterans Bureau were combined under the name, "Veterans Administration" under the provisions of Executive Order 5398.

Administrative offices for Veterans Administration Hospital Library Service were established in Washington, D. C., in October, 1923 under the leadership of Miss Elizabeth E. Pomeroy, who remained as its director until her retirement in 1946.<sup>2</sup>

Veterans Administration Hospital Library services are an integral part of the VA Medical Program. Each VA hospital has at least two libraries — medical library for professional staff and ancillary service, and a general library for the use of patients and personnel.

The libraries at the VA Hospital in Salisbury were established in 1953 and dedicated December 6 of that year. A chief librarian, an assistant librarian, two part-time clerical assistants, several patient assistants, and seven regularly scheduled volunteers

compose the library staff. The medical library and two general libraries serve a clientele of over 1,800 persons.

The medical library has been placed strategically in the Medical Building, thus making it readily available to medical personnel and the ancillary services. It has been classified by a combination of the National Library of Medicine and the Library of Congress classification schemes so that scientific and technical books may be interfiled with the medical volumes.

The Dewey Decimal classification has been used for non-fiction in the patients' libraries. Fiction is arranged alphabetically by author's last name.

In the patients' libraries, the collection totals about 10,000 volumes of fiction and non-fiction, including reference works. Practically every subject field is represented except law. The VA legal sections have these books, making it unnecessary to include them in the hospital libraries. Also included are pictures, pamphlets, and other materials which have been compiled into units of information for the remotivation program.

The medical library collection consists of books, bound and unbound journals, reports, pamphlets, reprints and photostats, and totals nearly 3,000 volumes and items. This is a changing collection since it is constantly being brought up-to-date. Emphasis is on general medicine, nursing, psychiatry, psychology, surgery, rehabilitation medicine, and social work.

VA Library Service today is a library program with three dimensions: Service to patients, medical staff, ancillary services, and to personnel who participate in various training programs of the hospital.<sup>3</sup> The latter group has access to individual shelves arranged for its use in the medical library, special services such as reference and bibliography, reading lists, and interlibrary loans for material from public and other VA hospital libraries.

Special services offered to patients include programs in the library, with book reviews, book talks, and travelogs; book clubs on women's wards; reader's advisory service; weekly ward cart service; work with patients on the Community Placement Ward in cooperation with Social Work Service; open house during National Library Week, and coffee hours to commemorate holidays.

Medical staff and ancillary services are offered a variety of services such as compilation of bibliographies; acquisition of photostats, reprints and photocopies; translations; interlibrary loans, and checking of bibliographic data used in articles prepared by them.

Automation, improved communications, and developments in micro-reproduction create new means for the VA Library System to expand and improve its services. The necessity to develop these means arises from the constantly increasing pressures placed on VA library resources and services by the research and clinical work of the VA hospitals. The ability of the VA Hospital Library Service to adjust to new conditions of service is being sharply challenged and will continue to be so in the years ahead.

#### References:

2. Gartland, Henry J.: Elizabeth Ella Pomeroy, *AHIL Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 1; 6 (Fall, 1966).
3. Gartland, Henry J.: Three-Dimensional Program—Veterans Administration Library Service, *Library Journal*, Vol. 90; 7296 (October 15, 1966).