



# The rapidly changing world of the ICGP library

**The most important aspect of the librarian's role today is to help users filter through the information overload, writes Gillian Doran**

**WHAT DO BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, Casanova, J Edgar Hoover, Mao Tse-tung and Batgirl have in common?** Well, whether real or fictional – they were all librarians! This fact might explain why Hoover was so interested in information and how Mao became influenced by one of the pioneer Marxists of China, ie. his chief librarian boss.<sup>1</sup>

Times have changed and the Dewey decimal system and Boolean logic are no longer the buzzwords in the 'industry', being replaced by the technologies of Google and Twitter, not to mention Athens and SurveyMonkey! Hard cover books are now available on Kindles, journal and book publishers host articles on the web and almost anything can be bought online and delivered to your door. Librarians, users and technology are entwined due to a long co-dependent relationship that has evolved over time, but particularly in the past 10 years.

The physical space that in the past used to define a library is also evolving. Now external hard drives hold collections and 'clouds' organise our computer activities. Technological development has meant that librarians and users do not have to be in any one space at a particular time. Information is now accessible online every minute of every day from inestimable locations.

*The Punch Library of Humour* book was borrowed from the library in Rotorua, New Zealand, 61 years ago, but was recently found among family belongings in Marie Sushames' attic. Ms Sushames was presented with the fine on her 85th birthday, Rotorua's *Daily Post* newspaper reported. The library's manager, Jane Gilbert, said she would be delighted to waive the charges in return for the privilege of displaying a book which had been 'out for 61 years'.<sup>2</sup>

So while you all hunt around in your surgery or home for library books that you borrowed ages ago, consider the fact that even the dreaded library fines are changing and we are unlikely to encounter these types of cases again as more and more information is provided online.

However, at the heart of it all, librarianship and library services remain intact. The mode and speed of delivery of information as well as the actual volume of information may have exploded, but through it all, the librarian sits ready to filter through the deluge. Assisted by technological advances, particularly email and the internet, librarians and their users source clinical, educational and personal information on a daily basis.

Users too have changed. There are now three main types of users:<sup>3</sup> those who carry the Luddite flag despite the

technological changes occurring around them; those that have adapted to the various technologies as they have been developed; and those that have been brought up in these technological times. While users are becoming more and more tech savvy, librarians have to be able to facilitate all three groups.

The Luddites may resist technology themselves but often in this information age need others to access online information for them. The 'adapted user' may need training on resources and/or reliable information located efficiently in this fast moving society, while the relationship between librarians and the 'tech savvy users' is still developing, as these users are a fairly recent phenomenon. Librarians have to be aware of, and use in the most reliable manner, the latest software and also show the 'tech savvy users' that there is life beyond planet Google!

The traditional librarian role as gatekeeper of information has changed considerably. The role of the 21st century librarian is a much more complex one. The librarian must now be a go-between for the Luddite, a guide/mentor for the 'adaptees' and an ally for the 'techies'. Despite the myriad changes, the tenet that remains constant is that people still need to find information and know that librarians are a trusted source for acquiring much of same.

In this regard, to assist ICGP members in filtering through the information overload, my librarian colleague Trish and myself have developed an information skills module which we hope will be of benefit to both clinical practice and everyday life. Alternatively, the ICGP member can contact us directly to assist them with searches and literature retrieval. See *Forum* May 2012 issue for further details on how to access the information skills module.<sup>4</sup>

## **What does the future hold?**

Where to next? Well that is anyone's guess! Who would have thought even five years ago that tweets would be the new conversations or that facebooking would be a leisure pursuit! So, as librarians we will wait for the next technological development and decide whether to embrace or reject it depending on our users' information needs.

One thing is for sure: librarians, users and technology have certainly come a long way from the *Book of Kells*. And just for your trivia information, Batgirl aka Barbara Gordon, was head librarian of the Gotham City Library!<sup>1</sup>

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References on request