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# **“TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE”: NORDIC–BALTIC CO-OPERATION PROGRAMME FOR MEDICAL LIBRARIES**

## **Abstract**

Within the framework of the Nordic-Baltic partnership programme, Norway and Lithuania have established a special bilateral programme for 10 years. In year 2004 the partnership programme was finished. The evaluation of results and mutual benefits during 10 years period of co-operation are described in the presentation. The positive and negative factors for successful co-operation of this experience are emphasise.

*Communication is all-important in partnerships - to share information, develop professional skills and awareness, and promote the interchange of ideas. To be successful and sustainable there must be a two way process!* (Jean Shaw, UK. EAHIL Newsletter, 1996, 36.).

## **Background**

The Baltic and the Nordic countries have always been closely linked geographically, climatologically and culturally. After the Baltic countries became independent in 1991, it was natural to establish Nordic–Baltic relations in many fields including medical librarianship

The Nordic/Baltic health libraries programme was initiated in 1994 when the Nordic Association for Medical and Health Information met with Baltic colleagues in Oslo in connection with the EAHIL conference.

Within the framework of the Nordic-Baltic partnership programme, Norway and Lithuania have established a special bilateral programme. In order to become acquainted with our new partners and to plan future activities, SMH, the Norwegian medical library group, visited Kaunas and Vilnius for the first time in 1996

## **Situation before partnership program between Norwegian-Lithuanian libraries**

From the Soviet times we inherited a soviet type library with closed access to holding and heavy structure. Political literature formed 20% of the holding of the Library as propaganda of Soviet ideology was one of the main tasks even for Medical educational institution library. 54% of publications were in Russian, 30% in Lithuanian, and 16% in foreign languages.

Absence of PC's and Library information system only printed catalogue cards, no foreign professional literature and knowledge, no contact with foreign libraries and professional associations.

### **Needs for doctors and students**

Our users needed international textbooks and medical books, international journals, access to databases. Full text journal articles were in heavy demand.

Our users have no Experience and knowledge to search for information.

### **Needs for medical librarians**

Our librarians had no information on Health library framework (or scheme of organization) and services abroad.

We lacked information on new library technologies and international professional knowledge.

Up-to-date professional literature is a problem even now because of lack of funds. Due to our limited financial capabilities we are not able to subscribe to professional periodicals as we subscribe only to 30 titles of international medical journals. The literature for students is still in short supply.

Participation in international conferences, workshops, and seminars is one of possible forms of staff professional development. It was completely unavailable at Soviet times and is still very limited at present as well.

We had no contacts with foreign libraries and librarians. Contacts were possible only between Soviet Libraries, and the content of partnership was based only on "socialist competition" for statistical figures.

### **Partnership with Norwegian Library Association SMH**

The aim of the first project was to provide Lithuanian libraries with up-to-date medical textbooks according to priority lists from Kaunas and Vilnius medical libraries.

As a result our libraries received a good collection of new medical textbooks from Norwegian libraries and publishers.

Norwegian colleagues understood our great demand for full text journal articles and suggested free article copy service for Lithuania over NOSP web page. SMH invited Norwegian medical libraries to join this program and now 40 libraries help us by sending free copies.

Since 1997 we receive on the average 1000 copies per year from various Nordic Libraries. We appreciate this help very much.

During this period our librarians were supported to attend EAHIL, NAMHI meetings and workshops. Due to this support we could gain access to the latest information on new library technologies and implement this knowledge at home on return. We also received an invaluable opportunity to get acquainted and to talk to colleagues from various countries.

As a part of this support the EAHIL membership fee is paid for 2 persons. Our representatives are even involved in EAHIL and NAHMI Board activities as board members.

### **Transfer of Knowledge**

A valuable part of the partnership program is the transfer of professional knowledge. It is a very useful means for the professional development of our staff, because other courses and seminars, which were held in Lithuania, did not meet the specific requirements of medical library information services.

Under the co-operation between the Norwegian Library Association Section for Medicine and Health, Union of Danish Librarians and the Kaunas University of Medicine Library the 5-day continuing education courses “Transfer of Knowledge” for Medical Librarians from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were held at Kaunas University of Medicine in March 2000.

These courses became possible due to the grant from Nordic Council of Ministry. They were held by experienced lecturers from Norway on the topics which are considered hot for medical librarians: Evidence Based Medicine / Cochrane Library, Reference Manager, searching PubMed, Medical Internet Resources.

In order to make the course material more available to all medical librarians it was translated into Lithuanian and put on the Library homepage.

All participants in their feedback forms pointed out the usefulness of the courses and expressed wishes to continue this educational program in the future. As a result “Transfer of Knowledge II” courses under the same program were organized in 2002 and “Transfer of Knowledge III” in 2004. The main topics were on Evidence Based Health, Evidence Based Librarianship, Health resources on the Net, Cooperation between Libraries.

With a help of courses run by ourselves we can spread newly acquired knowledge among other Lithuanian librarians who were not able to take part in the educational program.

Inspired of Scandinavian educational programme and having good background of medical information knowledge we started our user training programme, which was very popular among physicians and other medical professionals. We held 2440 hour courses for 2200 persons.

SMH arranged a 1-week study tour as a part of the “Knowledge transfer” project for 6 medical librarians from Lithuania. This tour was a good chance for our librarians to visit medical libraries and interlibrary loans, which are providing free article copies, meet their colleagues and improve professional knowledge.

### **Positive results of Partnership Program**

Acquired knowledge at the “Transfer of Knowledge” program was a stimulus to organize training courses as for library personnel as well for library user. We trained over 2000 health professionals on information searching from Kaunas and its surroundings.

As a result of educational activities, beginning with 2001 informatics has been included as a new subject into the University study program for Public health students.

On the other hand user training naturally encourages staff to take greater responsibility for their own personal development. It is very important in present situation when the importance of the role of medical librarian in medical community is continually increasing.

The community of medical librarians is rather small in Lithuania and other Baltic countries. This is the reason why we have no national association for medical Librarians. Inspired by successful partnership between Norwegian and Lithuanian medical libraries we decided to establish Baltic Association for Medical Libraries (BAML), which has been formalized last autumn. We expect a successful partnership between Baltic and Nordic medical libraries in the future

### **Negative factors for partnership**

The main obstacles, which prevent our cooperation to become even more efficient, are:

- Language problems. Most of people had acquired basic English or German language knowledge at schools or universities. Nevertheless as a rule their practical skills were very limited. Only scarcely they could communicate fluently enough, especially the older generation. At present the language situation tends to gradually improve and it is not so urgent for the younger generation.
- Financial problems. Due to the lack of appropriate funding we are not capable of participating in various events as equal partners in financial terms
- Psychological barriers to communicate. Both of the factors mentioned above cause certain psychological communication barriers. In spite of a friendly environment people usually feel uncomfortable and experience a lack of self-confidence in situations when they are dependent and cannot share organisational burden or equally contribute to discussions

### **Factors for successful partnership**

- Long-term partnership program is one of the main factors for achieving good results. The partnership between Norwegian and Lithuanian health libraries already lasts for 9 years.
- Partnership between national associations rather than between twin libraries allows involving much more people into activities.
- Mutual analysis of needs and mutual program creation. Joint efforts are necessary both in the analysis of needs and collaborative program creation. “Transfer of Knowledge” program is a good example of such approach. It was based both on our requests and proposals of the Norwegian party on relevant topics in European librarianship.
- Priority for professional development. It is a backbone for Library modernisation and service improvement process.
- Support to attend conferences and workshops. It is a useful factor for professional development
- Involving into activities of professional associations (EAHIL, NAMHI). Participation in professional associations are very useful in establishing international contacts, acquiring new friends.
- Both sides personalities (activeness, friendliness, ability to communicate...).

### **Conclusion**

The partnership program between Baltic and Nordic medical libraries and the knowledge gained from Nordic colleagues have contributed very much to our professional achievements. The close collaboration between SHM and Lithuanian medical libraries remains to be an important stimulus for our future activities.