



## **An Innovative Interlibrary Loan Program Linking Eastern Europe's Latvia with US and Canadian Medical Libraries**

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To cite this article: Donna Flake & Velta Poznaka (2007) An Innovative Interlibrary Loan Program Linking Eastern Europe's Latvia with US and Canadian Medical Libraries, Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserve, 17:3, 9-14

To link to this article: [https://doi.org/10.1300/J474v17n03\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J474v17n03_04)



Published online: 04 Oct 2008.



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# An Innovative Interlibrary Loan Program Linking Eastern Europe's Latvia with US and Canadian Medical Libraries

Donna Flake  
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**ABSTRACT.** Forty U.S. and Canadian medical libraries are electronically transmitting interlibrary loans to the Eastern European Medical Library of Latvia. This resource sharing initiative is an outgrowth of a pilot project of the International Cooperation Section of the Medical Library Association. The interlibrary loans are sent free of charge using the National Library of Medicine's DOCLINE system. This article will discuss the success of this program and how it started. doi: 10.1300/J474v17n03\_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Interlibrary loan, international cooperation, Latvia, DOCLINE

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Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserve,  
Vol. 17(3) 2007

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doi:10.1300/J474v17n03\_04

## **INTRODUCTION**

Prior to 1991, libraries in Latvia, a republic of the USSR in Eastern Europe, were not allowed to communicate with noncommunist countries. Dutifully, the Medical Library of Latvia, which has served as the national medical library of Latvia since its creation in 1945, obtained interlibrary loans from Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, and other communist regions of the USSR. Even though the interlibrary loans were free, the standard turnaround time was two months, and in some cases took six months.

After the establishment of the independent country of Latvia, the medical library continued to use their long-established interlibrary loan practices. However, Nordic libraries, in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Norway also began sending interlibrary loans to the Latvian library. Most of these interlibrary loans were sent free of charge, but sometimes there was a fee. The interlibrary loans received from Nordic libraries arrived in about two weeks. It was very difficult for the inadequately funded Medical Research Library of Latvia to pay the occasional interlibrary loan costs. As of 2005, the Medical Library of Latvia still requests and receives interlibrary loans from the Nordic countries—thirty-four in 2005, and twenty in 2004.

## **MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION SISTER LIBRARY INITIATIVE**

In 1999, the International Cooperation Section of the Medical Library Association (ICS) began a pilot project, and “adopted” two international libraries as sister libraries. Those libraries were the Medical Library of Latvia and the Holberton Hospital Library on the island of Antigua in the Caribbean. The project existed from 1999 to 2003. It was named the Sister Library Initiative. At the end of the pilot project the Medical Library of Latvia became the sister library of the Coastal Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Medical Library in Wilmington, North Carolina. This paper will only cover interlibrary loans to the Medical Library of Latvia. In the beginning of the Sister Library Initiative project, Coastal AHEC Director, Donna Flake<sup>1</sup> served as chair of the Latvian portion of the project, and later, chair of the entire project.

When the project was in its initial phase, Velta Poznaka (then deputy director of the Latvian library and now director) relayed that one of the major needs of the Medical Library of Latvia was to receive prompt,

free interlibrary loans of medical journal articles. In 2000, the Sister Library Initiative petitioned the Research Libraries Group, which graciously donated the full Ariel scanning software to the Latvian Library. Next, the members of the Sister Library Initiative searched DOCLINE to locate libraries that delivered documents via Ariel. DOCLINE is the National Library of Medicine's (NLM) automated interlibrary loan request routing and referral system. The purpose of the system is to facilitate document delivery service among libraries by linking journal holdings. It efficiently routes the requests to potential lending libraries on behalf of the borrower.

Approximately 150 US and Canadian libraries that use DOCLINE also use Ariel. Eighty libraries were selected as possible interlibrary loan providers. A standard e-mail describing the Medical Library Association's International Section's Sister Library Initiative with the Medical Library of Latvia was sent asking each library to provide up to 30 free interlibrary loans to the Latvian library during the current year. Of the 80 U.S. and Canadian Libraries contacted, 40 libraries agreed. Some library directors were very happy to provide this service, because they felt they were reaching out to another area of the world in peace and generosity. The libraries that chose not to participate cited various reasons—needing to be reimbursed for the interlibrary loans, already assisting another international library, or policies that would not allow for this arrangement.

The National Library of Medicine administers the DOCLINE program. Fortunately, one of the MLA's Sister Library Initiative committee members was also head of public services at the National Library of Medicine and arrangements were easily made for the Medical Library of Latvia to become a DOCLINE library. The DOCLINE system requires that each library using DOCLINE complete a routing table. Thus the Medical Library of Latvia completed a routing table, listing the library identification symbol (LIBID) assigned to each library which agreed to provide up to 30 free interlibrary loans within the year. The National Library of Medicine assisted the Latvian library in registering as a DOCLINE library, and filling out its DOCLINE routing table based on a list of LIBID numbers provided by the Coastal AHEC.

### ***MEDICAL LIBRARY OF LATVIA***

Overall, the process of the Medical Library of Latvia requesting interlibrary loans from the libraries has been very simple. The Medical

Library of Latvia enters a request in the DOCLINE system, and the request is forwarded to the library that owns it. Once the lending library receives the request, a note appears in the DOCLINE record and says—"Latvian Library Request, Sister Library Initiative." This helps remind the various persons performing interlibrary loans not to charge a lending fee or cancel the request due to the word "free" written as maxcost. The lending library then electronically sends the free journal article to the Medical Library of Latvia. If the lending library does not own the item, the lending library replies "not owned," and the request is automatically routed by DOCLINE to another of the possible 40 libraries that should own the item. Since July 2000, the Medical Library of Latvia has made requests for 5,792 articles, and 90% of them have been filled.

When the project began in 1999 and for the following 3 years, most of the 40 lending libraries used Ariel software to transmit the journal articles electronically to the Latvian library. Recently however, Ariel software is used less frequently. Now some of the lending libraries scan the requested journal article into a PDF format, and either send an e-mail containing a hyperlink for the requested article to the Latvian library or send the article as an attachment in PDF form. The Latvian library then selects the hyperlink or clicks on the attachment to access the requested article. At that point, the Latvian library can print the article and give it to the patron, or forward the email with the hyperlink to the patron.

### ***HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN LATVIA***

Latvian doctors and health professionals have been very pleased and satisfied with the Medical Library of Latvia's interlibrary loan services. Talis Talents, the Under-Secretary for State, Ministry of Welfare for the Republic of Latvia, stated:

On behalf of the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, allow us to express our gratitude. Activities organized through the Sister Library Project, such as document delivery, have increased the potential of the library and have given new possibilities for the health care professionals and researchers of Latvia.

Dr. A. Gandzs, The Member of the Managing Council, Academician of the International Academy of Sciences in Ecological Security, and The General Director of the hospital, "Bikur Holim," says:

I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to obtain the latest information on the topics of my interest—internal medicine and hospital management. The obtained information helps me to treat patients and make better decisions. It is good that the library can obtain journal articles via fast electronic Interlibrary Loan. This facilitates my practical work in the hospital.

### ***UNITED STATES MEDICAL LIBRARIES***

In April 2003, the Medical Library Association International Section's pilot project ended. At that time, Donna Flake contacted the 40 libraries who had generously provided up to 30 free interlibrary loans per year and told them that pilot project had ended; however, the Medical Library of Latvia had now become the sister library to the AHEC library in Wilmington, North Carolina. After thanking each library for participating so generously during the pilot project, she asked if they would like to continue to provide up to 30 free interlibrary loans to the Latvian library. Thirty-three of the original forty libraries agreed to continue providing free interlibrary loans on an ongoing basis.

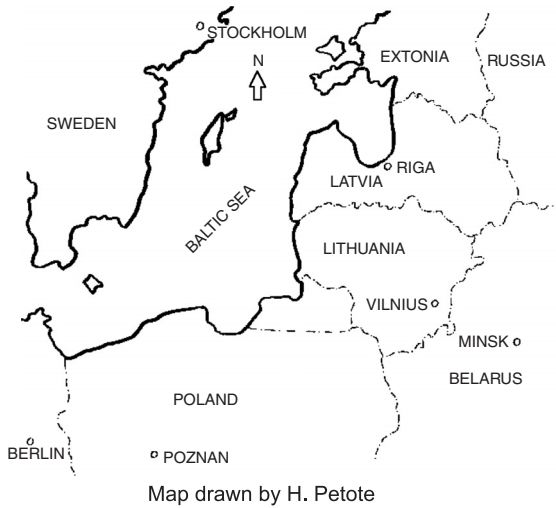
Pam Neumann, Director, Borland Library, University of Florida Health Science Center, Jacksonville, Florida, says:

This is a wonderful program. It has been very rewarding to hear the difference these interlibrary loans make. The electronic delivery of this material makes it possible for us to participate in this program at no real cost to us. The staff has the time to provide these copies without affecting service to our other patrons. We rarely get the opportunity to have such a positive effect on the lives of people thousands of miles away.

Mary Beth Klofas, Edward G. Miner Library, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, says:

The Miner Library was delighted to participate in the interlibrary loan program for the Latvian Library. I commend the Latvian Library's investment in technology that enabled them to receive materials quickly and bring information to health care professional immediately. Libraries and librarians demonstrate goodwill every day to advance the cause of patrons, regardless of where they are located. The Miner Library was honored to have played a small role in supporting patient care in Latvia.

### MAP SHOWING BALTIC EUROPE



The ongoing project continues to be an overwhelming success. It allows the lending library to help an underfunded Eastern European medical library, and it allows the health professionals of the Medical Library of Latvia to obtain essential medical information in a timely and cost-effective manner.

### NOTE

1. The first International Cooperation Section Award of the Medical Library Association was presented to Donna Flake in recognition of her dedication and outstanding service and leadership in international cooperation and outreach.

doi: 10.1300/J474v17n03\_04