

## Re: Albert et al.: Don't Close Medical Libraries: That's Where You Find Librarian Partners to Advance Medicine and Science

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Although this letter to the editor was not accepted for publication in the journal *Ophthalmology*, the authors believe the issues raised are important and deserve to be part of the public record.

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To the Editor,

We write in response to the editorial quoted in the title, particularly to challenge the assertion in its latter half by Dr. Van Gelder that medical libraries are no longer necessary in the digital age (1). This view reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the role and evolution of medical libraries.

Medical libraries have a rich and resilient history. Over centuries libraries have continuously evolved, with AI presenting just the latest in a long line of technological shifts. Far from being replaced, librarians are adapting by integrating AI tools into their collections and services while continuing to provide human judgment, expert guidance and contextual expertise that no algorithm can replicate.

Libraries have never been merely repositories for the "physical written word". From their inception, they have served as spaces for inquiry, learning and community engagement. As Winston Churchill once said about rebuilding the destroyed House of Commons, "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us" (2). Libraries shape the intellectual and collaborative environments of institutions, fostering learning and innovation. The portrayal of libraries as outdated book warehouses is inaccurate. Contemporary medical libraries are technology-enabled spaces with multi-purpose zones for collaboration, learning, study and wellbeing (3).

Librarians who work in the spaces are highly skilled information professionals who ensure seamless access to curated databases, full-text journals and evidence-based resources. Their work is expertly executed so that it often appears invisible, enabling easy access for users who may not realise the complex human expertise that makes it possible. This digitally enabled experience is the result of ongoing effort by librarians who design, maintain and optimise these systems. Behind every simple click-and-access moment is a librarian who has negotiated licenses, configured platforms, ensured interoperability and curated content to meet the needs of clinicians and researchers whenever, wherever.

Librarians also play a critical role in educating health professionals in research methodology, information literacy and critical appraisal. They empower users to evaluate the reliability of AI-generated content and to navigate information resources to produce rigorous, evidence-based research. Furthermore, librarians work in inter-disciplinary research teams as subject-matter experts to create high quality evidence such as systematic and scoping reviews which lead to new scientific insights.

The suggestion that ChatGPT or similar AI tools could replace medical libraries is fundamentally flawed. While these technologies hold promise, they often rely on unverified sources and can generate plausible but inaccurate information. In healthcare, such misinformation is not merely inconvenient - it can be harmful.

Medical librarians are actively shaping institutional policies regarding ethical integration of AI to ensure that new technologies are used responsibly. Their deep expertise in evaluating information sources is critical to developing a "centaur model" of AI adoption where human oversight complements machine capabilities (4). In this model, AI supports and augments the work of clinicians and researchers. It does not replace the nuanced judgment, ethical reasoning and contextual understanding that humans provide.

Far from being obsolete, medical libraries are at the forefront of technological integration. They are evolving into dynamic hubs that support clinical decision-making, research, education and clinician wellbeing. Librarians mentor, collaborate and guide users through the ethical and strategic use of information.

The future of medical libraries lies in synergy, not substitution. Human expertise and AI tools must work together to advance healthcare knowledge and practice. Medical librarians are not relics of a bygone era. They are essential partners in the digital transformation of healthcare.

References

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