

Title: Partnering Across Libraries and Institutions to Manage Veterinary Grey Literature

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Theme: Partners and Collaborations that Make a Difference in Animal Health

Abstract

Problem: A significant portion of the literature of veterinary medicine is grey literature. Each of three national libraries of the United States (National Library of Medicine, National Agricultural Library and Library of Congress) covers some portion of the veterinary literature. There is no comprehensive plan to collect, ensure access and preserve the veterinary grey literature.

Objective: Conduct a needs assessment to use in developing an action plan to improve access and preserve the veterinary grey literature

Population:

All libraries serving veterinary schools accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

Methodology:

Focus Group: In September 2007, seven veterinary librarians from across the United States met at Texas A&M University for a 3-day session to discuss issues surrounding the veterinary grey literature, brainstorm ideas of potential remedies, and create the beginnings of an action plan.

This group of librarians represented several different academic veterinary libraries and the AVMA.

Survey: In March 2008 a survey on veterinary collection practices, emphasizing archives and grey literature handling, was sent to librarians at all AVMA accredited schools of veterinary medicines.

Results: Response rate for survey completion was nearly 75%.

Conclusion: Preservation/digitization projects which leverage institutional repositories of participant institutions. The current environment, with increasing opportunities for digitization of information resources and the growth of institutional repositories in universities, provides the foundation and potential solution for enhancing access and preservation of veterinary grey literature.

Background

Grey literature plays an important role in veterinary medicine, especially in clinical practice and research. Conference proceedings, technical reports and white papers are recognized venues for

the reporting of recent research in many scientific disciplines, including veterinary medicine. Publications and websites of organizations and government entities are important, and sometimes the only sources, for the latest information about clinical studies and trials, new protocols and treatments, and case reports. Veterinary grey literature carries another intrinsic value. It can also capture the intellectual output and provide the documentation of the lifespan of veterinary colleges, organizations, businesses and industries. Because of this, it literally forms the fabric of the historical record of veterinary medicine. One striking example taken from the history of veterinary education in North America illustrates the importance of preserving veterinary grey literature as an essential record of veterinary medicine. Forty-one of the early schools of veterinary medicine in North America have ceased to exist. Nearly half of those schools have left no extant publications, so we know nothing of them and the details about early veterinary education, teachers and practitioners that their publications might have provided.

It is important to precisely state the working definition for grey literature that has guided the projects and plans described in this paper. This definition emanates from the International Conference on Grey Literature, based on a consensus reached at the 1995 meeting and revised slightly in 2004. The conference defines grey literature as “that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers” (1).

Objective

The objective of all of the research and activities described in this paper is to gather data to serve as a foundation to create and continually develop a comprehensive, collaborative action plan to collect, ensure access and preserve the veterinary grey literature.

Methodology

Focus Group

In an attempt to explore the issues surrounding veterinary grey literature and brainstorm possible management scenarios, a group of eight veterinary librarians from several United States universities and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) were brought together and hosted by the Medical Sciences Library at Texas A&M University as a select focus group, based on their expertise, experience and interest in veterinary grey literature. Participants in the three-day session included: C. Trenton Boyd, University of Missouri; Vicki Croft, Washington State University; Gayle Willard, Kansas State University; Gretchen Stephens, Purdue University; Diane Fagen, AVMA Library; Heather K. Moberly, Oklahoma State University; and Esther Carrigan and Joe Jaros, Texas A&M University.

Brought together by common interests and experiences, the focus group members coalesced around veterinary grey literature issues, making the transition from a focus group to a steering group, committed to move forward in a unified effort to make a difference in the management of veterinary grey literature. The group chose the name, Veterinary Archives and Grey Literature Steering Group, or V-AGS, and reached consensus on the following mission statement: to devise a plan and define an infrastructure to enhance access to primary veterinary literature (grey literature). The group also identified the following key goals as mission-critical: the

identification of source materials and locations; the improvement of discovery tools; and a preservation plan for the veterinary literature. Because the steering group believes that a successful solution will require involvement and commitment from a diverse population representing all grey literature stakeholders, the following core values for the group and its efforts have been defined: collaboration, cooperation, sustainability, and scalability.

The outline of an action plan was developed which included several ambitious undertakings. First, conduct a needs assessment by surveying all veterinary libraries that serve American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredited schools. A parallel effort was planned to quantify the extent (and therefore quantify the importance) of grey literature to the veterinary literature in general. Other initiatives included: communicate and raise awareness of grey literature issues among our colleagues in the Medical Library Association, as well as our academic and international colleagues; build new collaborations and cultivate new partners; encourage the digitization of grey literature including the use of standard metadata; address the preservation of grey literature; and, develop educational materials for new librarians and deans of veterinary colleges.

Survey of Veterinary Libraries

In March 2008 a web-based survey was sent to all libraries serving programs of veterinary medicine that were accredited by the AVMA. There were 36 questions covering general library collection demographics, archives and grey literature. Each question included an opportunity for respondents to provide comments.

Results

Survey Analysis

A total of 42 libraries were invited to take the survey; responses were received from 31 libraries (73.8%). The 42 invited libraries included 28 from the United States, which had a response rate of 86% (24 of 28) and 14 international, which had a response rate of 50% (7 of 14). Although the responses were heavily weighted toward the United States, there was little difference in the overall response trends of the two geographically disparate groups.

An analysis of the survey responses and comments identified several major challenges for veterinary grey literature efforts. This data has been used to refine and further develop the action plan outlined by the V-AGS group. Fewer than half of the responding libraries actively acquire grey literature; there needs to be an expansion of those actively acquiring grey literature or a comprehensive plan developed that clarifies the responsibilities and eventually creates formalized agreements between those committed to actively acquire grey literature. A clear consensus emerged among respondents that the acquisition and preservation of their own institutional publications was an ongoing challenge. Only about 41% actively work to acquire these archival materials; many simply rely on gifts of these materials to the library. This situation is a chilling flashback to the fate of those 41 early United States veterinary schools mentioned above. Although over 90% of the responding libraries have digitization or institutional repository programs, only 10% of the libraries are directly actively involved in digitization or institutional repositories. One of the most obvious new collaborations for veterinary libraries is with the digital initiatives staff at their own institutions. The overwhelming level of institutional

activity in digitization and institutional repositories sends a clear message that this approach has tremendous possibility as a foundation and solution for sustained access, availability and preservation of grey literature. Survey responses indicate that the types of grey literature most at risk are professional society and organization newsletters and annual reports, continuing education course materials from veterinary programs, industry publications, and audiovisuals, especially those of a non-textual nature. The fact that two-thirds of the responding libraries are under space pressures from external constituencies underscores the need for digital solutions with cooperative plans and formalized agreements for necessary print retention. This also indicates the need for a careful study of the validity and completeness of the electronic version compared to print counterparts. Preservation programs exist in just over half of the responding institutions. Once again, strong collaboration with the general university library where this expertise resides is critical. Survey responses strongly validated the belief among the V-AGS group that efforts must be made to communicate and raise awareness across a wide variety of colleagues and stakeholders, and to develop educational materials, best practices and tool kits.

Informed Action Plan

Needs Assessment

The value of the initial survey responses recommends continuing follow-up to clarify and expand input from the initial group of participants and the broader international veterinary library community.

Attempts to quantify the relative amount of grey literature in veterinary medicine as an indicator of its importance have provided a varied picture. In a paper delivered at the Second International Conference of Animal Health Information Specialists (1998) Williams and Croft estimated the percentage of grey literature in veterinary medicine as being greater than 16% (2). A bibliometric study of core veterinary journals that were published in the year 2000 was undertaken by Pelzer and Wiese and published in 2003 (3). Those authors estimated the percentage of grey literature at just over 6%. A follow-up study is currently underway, led by Robin Sewell at the Medical Sciences Library, Texas A&M University, following the expanded definition for grey literature mentioned above. Preliminary results suggest a percentage of grey literature well above the Pelzer study. Another attempt at developing an estimate of the prevalence of veterinary grey literature was undertaken by requesting acquisitions statistics for the period 2006-2008 from members of the V-AGS group, who tend to be strong grey literature proponents. The percentage of grey literature acquired ranged between 20% to over 50%. Clearly, there is more work to be done to provide consistent and reliable information.

Communicate and Raise Awareness

Attempts to communicate and raise awareness have largely focused on connecting with colleagues through presentations at conferences. The complete V-AGS group or individual representative members have made presentations at several carefully selected conferences to reach specific audiences and begin building a network of converts and partners in the grey literature efforts. The following list identifies the conferences, dates and chief audience:

- USAIN (United States Agricultural Network) Conference (March 2008)—agricultural librarian colleagues, who share a dependence on grey literature
- Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association (May 2008 and continuing)—first order of colleagues and existing partners

- International Conference on Grey Literature (GL10) (December 2008)—general grey literature colleagues, international scope
- ACRL—Association of College and Research Libraries Annual Meeting (March 2009)—academic colleagues
- EAHIL Workshop (June 2009)—European counterpart to Medical Library Association
- International Conference of Animal Health Information Specialists/ International Congress of Medical Librarianship (August-September 2009)—international colleagues

A Veterinary Grey Literature website is currently being planned by the V-AGS group. At this stage of the development process, content ideas include general information on veterinary grey literature and the V-AGS collaboration, a clearinghouse section for newly released grey veterinary literature, information and links to active digitization projects and selected websites. The New York Academy of Medicine website and *Grey Literature Report* is a model for this type of effort (http://www.nyam.org/library/pages/grey_literature_report).

Both of these approaches, conference participation and website development will continue into the future, as well as the publication of articles on veterinary grey literature topics.

New Partners and New Collaborations

Survey responses clearly indicate the importance of building new partnerships and new collaborations. Most veterinary libraries depend on main university libraries (academic librarians) for acquisitions, cataloging, processing, archives management, digitization and preservation. The existing veterinary library community is a foundation for grey literature efforts, but these efforts must spread across medical librarians and agriculture librarians, as well as academic and special libraries. They also must grow from the United States into the international community. Building effective connections with appropriate staff in veterinary schools will be a key factor in the ability to preserve the institutional history of veterinary medicine. Professional veterinary organizations and governmental agencies, as creators and disseminators of veterinary grey literature, are obviously prime candidates to become important partners in any grey literature effort. The survey also clearly indicates the need for librarians to build relationships with the digital initiatives staff at their home institutions and become involved in digitization and institutional repository projects.

Digitization, Metadata and Preservation of Grey Literature

These pieces of the grey literature action plan are closely tied together. In February 2009 Texas A&M University Medical Sciences Library and Oklahoma State University William E. Brock Memorial Library were the recipients of a \$20,000 Library Technology Award from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine South Central Region. Their funded grant, “A Proposal for the Digitization and Preservation of a Key Historical Resource in Human and Animal Medicine: The Index-Catalogue of Medical and Veterinary Zoology” provides for the digitization of this historical grey literature item and its placement in the institutional repositories of both universities. The immediate result of this project is digitizing, enhancing access and preserving this print resource. Just as important is its ability to serve as a demonstration project for small scale digitization and preservation grey literature projects. The project also embodies the core values of collaboration, cooperation, scalability and sustainability originally adopted by the V-AGS group. Preservation efforts must include more than the single approach of digitization.

Solutions must also be identified for preserving print and the physical item. To be successful these efforts will likely require formalized commitments and agreements among all grey literature stakeholders.

Conclusions

The visions and plans described in this paper continue to unfold and develop in a continuous cycle. Connections with colleagues and early attempts to build new collaborations have been met with genuine interest, enthusiasm and a willingness to participate. They have enriched and impacted these evolving plans. Much remains to be done, including:

- develop a website
- expand international partners
- develop a mentoring plan and tool kit for librarians
- develop formalized commitments/agreements across libraries, institutions and grey literature creators
- identify and preserve isolated veterinary grey literature content in non-veterinary libraries
- create a web registry for the widespread grey digitized resources and access metadata that will be accomplished through these efforts

The underlying principle of the plan is to reach out to the entire veterinary community to make connections with individuals who are drawn to this grass roots effort and are spurred into action.

References

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