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# A Tale of Two Health Sciences Libraries Working to Improve Health Literacy

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# A Tale of Two Health Sciences Libraries Working to Improve Health Literacy

Margot Malachowski, MLS; Kate Saylor, MSI

## **Objectives:**

Our presentation demonstrates two health sciences libraries performing outreach in public libraries to achieve these community goals: (1) increased awareness of various high-quality online resources for health information; (2) improved confidence in finding and evaluating good health information; and (3) an increased knowledge of the resources and benefits that can be gained from partnering with a health sciences library.

## **Methods:**

Public libraries play a role in health literacy by maintaining public internet access, supplying subscription-based health information resources, and teaching computer literacy skills. Our collaboration brings the skills and resources of health sciences librarians into the community. Springfield, MA is an ethnically diverse city of 153,060, with a poverty rate of 27.6%. Ann Arbor, MI is a less ethnically diverse location with a population of 113,934, and a 20.2% poverty rate. Both librarians anticipate that many participants will be low to moderately skilled computer users with varying levels of literacy. We instruct through the live searches projected in the front of the classroom. Whenever possible, we lead hands-on classes in computer labs. We teach how to search for and evaluate online health information. All information presented is evidence-based and freely available to the public



## **Results:**

In 2011, University of Michigan Taubman Health Sciences Library (THL) provided 8 instruction sessions at in partnership, reaching 57 community members. Baystate Health Sciences Library (BHSL) provided 9 sessions and reached 39 community members. We averaged 5 participants per class, with some classes attracting up to 25 attendees, and others only 1-2. (1 and 2) Of those surveyed, 100% attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they know more about finding high-quality health information on the internet and knew where to get more help. (3) Benefits to public libraries were reported as increased ability to offer special topics computer classes and appreciation for support with more specialized reference questions.



## **Conclusions:**

THL and BHSL, two health sciences libraries located 700 miles apart, provided similar outreach services and experienced similar results. These collaborations with public libraries responded to consumer interests, supported public library programming and contributed to health literacy goals in the communities that we serve.

