

# HOSPITAL LIBRARIES

and work with the  
disabled in the  
community

Edited by Mona E. Going

# HOSPITAL LIBRARIES

## AND WORK WITH THE DISABLED IN THE COMMUNITY

Third edition

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## Book Selection for Hospital Libraries

Wylva Partington ALA  
District Librarian, Queen Elizabeth II Hospital  
Welwyn Garden City/Herts County Library

In a hospital library, as in any library, the selection of stock is related to the recreational, educational and information needs of the potential library users. These will include patients and staff; the latter will require books for use in their work with patients as well as for their personal interests. The hospital may be a general hospital, including departments of geriatrics, psychiatry and a children's ward, or it may be a specialist hospital. If the library serves a health district, there will be a general hospital and one or two smaller hospitals which may be specialist. These factors affect book selection.

So what are the needs of those using the hospital library? Firstly, the needs are those of the patients, who are the reason for the existence of the hospital and towards whose care the efforts of all the staff are directed. The interests of hospital patients will be as varied as those of public library users. There are, however, two important differences—some patients will be non-readers who, on being shown the book trolley may say, often with an air of pride, 'I've never read a book in my life!' By conversation and discovery of patients' interests, supported by an attractive book stock, this attitude may be changed. The other difference is that patients are people in special circumstances; they are isolated from their normal life and contacts and under the strain of having to cope with the physical and mental effects of illness. Sometimes these effects are long term or even permanent, but short or long term patients, especially those who have not been in hospital before, will be apprehensive about their illness and preoccupied with concern about domestic responsibilities which have had to be abandoned.

These circumstances, together with the continual distraction of the chat of other patients, ward activities, and visits from doctors, physiotherapists and various technicians, are not conducive to

concentration. Some patients will have to face a permanent change in their way of life as a result of their illness; heart conditions, strokes and serious injury resulting in disability will cause a previously active person to face the need to adapt to a more sedentary way of life. A doctor or psychologist will sometimes ask for the librarian's help in arousing the interest of a very depressed patient or will 'prescribe' a particular type of book to encourage a patient to overcome a physical or mental disability. This adds another dimension to the hospital library service and in this respect it differs from the public library. The work of the hospital librarian relates to the work of other therapists.

A varied stock is essential if the library is to meet these demands effectively and if the right books are to be available at the right time. However, no library can be self-sufficient and it will be necessary for the hospital librarian to have access to a wider stock through local and regional inter-library lending systems. Books on technical subjects, for example, are of varying standards and become out of date quickly; it will be wiser to borrow these as they are required.

As far as possible, when selecting stock, the books should be seen. The print should be clear and the books light in weight. At one time paperbacks were not considered suitable for use in hospital libraries, the poor paper and small print making them very difficult to read. Currently published paperbacks are more clearly printed and of attractive appearance, particularly when reinforced with plastic covers. They do not have a very long life but are an economical way of providing a large selection of light fiction. They are also easy to hold and many patients prefer them to bound books.

A plentiful supply of books in large print editions will be needed. As a result of the increased number of the population in higher age groups more old people are receiving hospital treatment and on the orthopaedic wards, for example, there is always a proportion of geriatric patients who have had falls. The number of psychogeriatric patients is also increasing. Where there is a geriatric unit, including perhaps a day hospital, or a small geriatric hospital in the district, the quantity of large print books required will be very high. Consequently, it will be difficult to purchase those in sufficient quantities and a system of exchange between hospitals and local authority branch libraries is advisable.

A small collection of cassettes, including fiction and non-fiction will be useful and these too should be supplemented by access to a wider range from the local library service. Talking book machines should be available, and it will therefore be necessary to have access to the National Listening Library and the British Library of

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Tape Recordings for hospital patients (see Chapter 9 on Equipment), particularly in hospitals with a large number of patients.

#### **Short-term wards**

Many patients will be short term, particularly on the maternity wards and the ear, nose and throat wards. On medical and surgical wards a stay of a week or two is usual. The demand will be for light diversional reading in both fiction and non-fiction categories; but the stock must include a good selection of more serious reading for the discerning reader, also a variety of subject matter in the non-fiction section. Maternity patients, for example, welcome books on child care by reputable authors approved by nursing and medical staff but books of names are also appreciated. Patients on the ante-natal ward will be in hospital longer and will be on strict bed rest. The enforced inactivity will be more easily accepted if boredom is allayed by a good selection of books; such as up to date novels of a good standard, biography, travel and various books on crafts, including knitting. On the ear, nose and throat wards, some children's books will be needed and there will be patients on the medical wards who may find their eyesight temporarily affected by drug therapy or by diabetic or other conditions and these will welcome the large print editions.

#### **Long-term wards and special hospitals**

The needs of patients on the longer term wards or on special units will be more specific. The librarian will need to spend more time with these patients and the right books must be available to encourage them to read.

#### *Orthopaedic*

It has already been said that on the orthopaedic wards there will be a proportion of older patients who will need large print editions. A good choice of illustrated books on various subjects will also be needed. These patients will appreciate a selection of fiction by authors who were popular when they were younger. There will also be young people recovering from sports and motorcycling accidents and various age groups with orthopaedic conditions. Many of these patients may have been used to leading fairly active lives in which reading has probably figured very little. Adventure stories and thrillers with plenty of action will be needed and fiction with good plots to hold the attention. Non-fiction must include books on sport and motorcycling, true life war experiences and books on practical subjects such as gardening, and do-it-yourself

### *Hospital Libraries*

activities in the home. Books on card games provide ideas for passing the time and women like subjects such as crafts, cooking and colour schemes for the home. Books on animals are popular with all. It is mainly on the orthopaedic wards that technical books may be required by young people wishing to use the time to continue with studies. Some patients may need advice in preparing for a new career if their injuries are likely to prevent them continuing in their previous work. A connection with the local library system is invaluable in these cases and the schools' library service can be very helpful.

#### *Intensive care wards*

On the intensive care wards, where there are seriously ill patients, the library service may not be needed until the patient is on the way to recovery. These patients should not be neglected and, when it is approved by nursing and medical staff, a visit to offer some books will be welcomed. At first they may only be able to read for short periods. Short stories, essays and anthologies are useful in such cases. As their illness may compel them to lead more sedentary lives than before, encouraging them in the habit of reading whilst they are in hospital will prove helpful later. Just talking for short periods may lead to information about their interests which can be followed up with a supply of books and may be successful in introducing reading into their lives. The availability of a wide range of subjects is essential for this purpose.

#### *Chronic sick*

Young chronic sick and other patients with progressive incurable disease will need a wide variety of books to suit the various stages of their illness, and their way of life. Short stories are invaluable and books must be light to hold. Books about people with similar problems with which they can identify will often be of help; but these should only be offered with the approval of the medical and nursing staff.

#### *Children's wards*

The children's ward needs a special approach. Many will only be in hospital for a short period but, to a child away from home and all familiar things, even 24 hours can seem endless. The experience of a period in hospital is more traumatic to a child than to an adult. Most hospitals now allow unrestricted visiting by parents. However, keeping a sick child relaxed and quiet for long hours is

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difficult and the availability of favourite stories can help both child and parent. Some children may not have experienced the joy of books and the librarian should be prepared to spend some unhurried time on the ward reading to groups or individuals. Plenty of good picture books with simple texts and short stories will be useful. Books about pets and wild animals, also prehistoric animals are usually greeted with enthusiasm. Some good full-length fiction for the more advanced readers will be necessary. There will probably be a teacher visiting the ward regularly and the librarian should co-operate with her in providing background books for work that is being done with the children. Here again, the schools' library services can be of help.

#### *Geriatric wards*

The geriatric wards and geriatric day hospitals will require specially selected stock and efforts must be made to discover what will be of interest to individual patients. Communication with the elderly is a slow process and requires time and patience. The visit to these wards must not be hurried. Plenty of illustrated books are essential as well as large print. If time is spent looking at pictures with an old person, he will often begin to talk about early memories and interests; this can lead to the offer of more books. Illustrated books about Britain and overseas countries, flowers, animals, ships and trains, etc should all be used. Talking book machines and a good selection of cassettes will be needed.

Old people who are readers will need plenty of books by authors of long-standing popularity, such as Howard Spring, Edgar Wallace and C.S. Forester. Books by Jeffrey Farnol and Florence Barclay are still asked for and it is wise to have some in stock to supply on demand. Trivial love stories will not hold their interest for long, but good family stories without too many characters are always enjoyed. The classics are appreciated by many with established literary interests and many intelligent older people will even set out to study a specific subject—one lady in her eighties for example decided to learn Spanish so that she could talk to a Spanish nurse. The library must of course produce the necessary books to encourage this kind of effort.

#### *Psychiatric wards*

The service to patients in the psychiatric department or in a psychiatric hospital presents special problems. Communication is often difficult until the librarian is known and accepted. Many patients will be mobile and able to visit the library and will do so



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for a change of environment. They will be content to browse and the librarian must be prepared to get to know their interests and problems slowly. When confidence grows, it may be possible to offer some books to take away and read. There will also be a trolley service for patients recently admitted and confined to wards and to those who do not make the effort to visit the library. Patients suffering from mental illness find concentration difficult and some treatment causes amnesia making it difficult for them to read long passages and retain the sense. On the whole their interests are imaginative and books on philosophy and religion, including non-Christian religions, art and poetry are needed. These should not be too introspective. A good selection of illustrated books on art and books on various crafts and pottery will be necessary as a back-up to the activities arranged by the occupational therapists. Books to help the patients with their particular problems should be available to be used with the guidance of medical staff and psychologists.

### *Foreign languages*

On any ward, there may be a foreign patient who is unable to read English. Because of the language difficulty, these patients are more isolated and the feelings of apprehension and strangeness experienced by all patients are aggravated by being unable to communicate. Books in their own language will be a great help to them. Stock should include a selection of books in European languages, access to Asian and other languages will be possible through the local library system. Sets of British Red Cross Society *Language Cards* with questions and answers to help the ward staff with basic enquiries about the patient should be provided.

### *Patient information*

Pamphlets are available from various associations giving basic information to patients with chronic illnesses. Heart cases, diabetic and stroke patients will need to understand essential points of after-care. Similarly, patients who have had a mastectomy, hysterectomy or colostomy will require guidance. A stock of these pamphlets should be kept in the library and issued as required. Medical, nursing and health care staff should be aware of their availability and apply to the library when a patient needs this information. Books which help in the understanding of various chronic conditions should also be in stock; these must be evaluated carefully and the advice of medical and nursing staff should be sought. Books on health education should also be

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available as patients will often be prepared to give more serious thought to matters of health and hygiene when under hospital treatment.

#### **Services to staff**

The hospital staff will use the general library as a small branch library for their recreational reading needs. There will be a demand for fiction of a good standard and new publications both fiction and non-fiction. Staff will be interested in books with medical and hospital backgrounds which may not be suitable for patients so care should be taken not to include these on trolleys when visiting the wards. A symbol can be put on the spines so that they can be easily identified. All categories of staff will need the services of a professional, multi-disciplinary library for study and information. This may be administered jointly with the general library service, although separately accommodated. Whatever the administrative arrangement some books for study purposes can be supplied in the general library. Nursing officers attending management courses will be given lists of required reading and community nurse tutors will also provide lists for their students. The library for the nurses in training may be separately administered as part of the Nurse Education Department or it may be a part of the multi-disciplinary library, but these nurses will make use of the general library for projects on topics such as pollution or the effects of noise, etc. An adequate supply of books on such subjects must be available. Books about the personal experiences of the chronically sick or disabled will be of interest to all staff, who may recommend them for patients' reading; these books often appear on reading lists of various courses. Domestic staff will require books to assist them in their work, for example books on floor maintenance. Books and information for catering officers and dietitians will also be required. It is essential that the hospital library has a good and up to date collection of books on health and safety. Some staff may be studying on Open University courses and will appreciate a service that will supply the books from their required reading lists. Staff in various departments who are involved in teaching and training juniors will need books on teaching methods. Requests will be an aid to book selection in all these cases and access to local and national interlending facilities will be necessary to supplement stock.

Many hospital staff will require books to help them in their work with patients. Speech therapists will need simple stories to help patients who have speech defects or stroke patients to relearn speech. Children's books are often used for this purpose. The art

therapist will need a wide selection of books for patients learning to draw or paint, and also art books with good illustrations that can be copied. Social workers will require career information to help those having to take up different occupations. Teachers will need background information on various subjects, especially history and geography and including maps. Occupational therapists will need access to publications about equipment for the disabled to help handicapped patients to cope with activities of daily living. This information is available in pamphlets and lists published by the Disabled Living Foundation and by the Oxford Regional Health Authority on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Security.

Occupational therapists working with psychiatric patients will need suitable books to use in their daily programme of activities. Books on crafts, quiz books (with answers!) and a supply of playsets for play reading sessions will be required. An arrangement with the drama section of the local library service will be necessary as it will not be practicable to keep a large enough collection in the hospital library stock. Lessons in cookery are often given in the Occupational Therapy Department to encourage patients, especially those living alone, to take an interest in producing balanced meals. Clearly expressed recipes on basic cookery will be needed as well as the more exotic and ambitious ones that are generally popular.

The hospital library must be prepared to answer reference enquiries from staff and patients. Some enquiries will be of a professional nature and others may be made to settle points in personal discussions, or to answer crossword clues or quiz questions. A small collection of reference books will be needed. The items included will depend on the administrative arrangements of the library service. Where there is a multi-disciplinary library for the staff jointly administered with the general library, items such as the *Hospital and health services yearbook* and the *Medical directory* will be located there. Where there is no library for professional staff or where it is limited to the use of medical staff only, these titles will be needed in the general library. The reference stock should also include acts of Parliament relevant to the health service, the Health and Safety at Work Act, the *Social services yearbook*, the *Guide to the social services* and a good medical dictionary. *Whitaker's almanac* and a dictionary of quotations will answer many general enquiries and a collection of local information and guide books will be needed as many of the staff will be newcomers to the area.

The collection of general reference books should also include the following and others will be added as needs are indicated:

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*Cumulated fiction index and Sequels*  
*Debrett's correct form*  
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dictionary — *Oxford large print*  
an encyclopaedia  
*Equipment for the disabled* (series)  
*Gardens open to the public in England and Wales*  
a gazetteer (world) and maps — local and others  
*Good hotel guide*  
*Guide to the Social Services*  
the *Guinness book of records*  
*Help! I need somebody*. A guide to national associations for  
people in need (compiled by Sally Knight)  
*Metric conversion tables* — Croners  
the *National Trust guide*  
*Oxford Companions* to art, English literature and music  
*Roget's thesaurus*  
timetables  
*Voluntary organizations directory: a National Council of*  
*Voluntary Services directory*  
*Who's who*

The library staff will need a selection of bibliographical tools to aid book selection and to trace publications. These must include the weekly *British national bibliography* with the regular cumulations and *The Bookseller*. Up to date editions of *British books in print* and *Large type books in print* will also be needed. Where the library is administered jointly with a multi-disciplinary professional library, *Medical books in print* will also be needed and the *Catalogue of Lewis's medical, scientific and technical lending library* with up to date supplements. *The British Library Current Serials Received* and the *Medical Textbook Review* will also be invaluable.

Finally, having given consideration to the stock of the library, it must be remembered that setting up trolleys to visit the wards is also book selection. The age, sex and type of illness of the patients to be visited must be considered and appropriate books selected. Patients will not benefit from carefully selected book stock unless the same principles are applied to the selection on the book trolleys. Where voluntary help is used some librarians prefer that the trolleys are dressed by the library staff. If the trolleys are

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prepared by the volunteers the principles of selection for the different types of ward must be included in their training.

It will be seen that if an adequate service is to be provided to patients and staff, covering the recreational, educational and therapeutic aspects of a well-developed hospital library service, a carefully planned selection of fiction and non-fiction is needed. The aim should be to provide as good a service as that which is available to those able to visit a public library with the additional individual services tailored to the special needs of hospital patients and staff.