

Opening session

Chair

M. Walckiers

OPENING SESSION

Welcome addresses were received from:

Giuseppe Corticelli
Regional Councillor of Cultural Activities
Regione Emilia-Romagna

P. Hertner
President
L'Institut Universitaire Européen

Francesco Antonio Manzoli
President
Istituti Ortopedici Rizzoli

Lois Ann Colaianni
Chairperson
IFLA Section of Biological and Medical Science Libraries

Carolyn Murphy
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Copenhagen

Marc Walckiers
Chairman
European Organising Committee

Giuseppe Corticelli said:

"I am particularly glad to open the sessions of this Second European Conference of Medical Libraries, which our region has been proud to organize, together with Istituto per i Beni Culturali, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche and many other Italian and European bodies. I thank the European Association for Health Information and Libraries for choosing Italy as the venue, and those, among other bodies working in Italy, in the library field, who chose Regione Emilia-Romagna and in particular Istituto Rizzoli.

We believe that today the right of information, the "universal availability of documents" - according to UNESCO principles - is the most concrete and direct means of enlarging the sharing of decisional processes. Therefore, we believe that the library is an unique instrument for democracy. But from this point of view we must also consider the basic inadequacy to new requirements of Italian - and not only Italian - library organization. Instrumental low-profile concepts are deep rooted, still for no valid reason, and libraries are still seen as the practical support for this or that particular activity, for this or that group of operators and users, barred to all others, separated one from the other.

On the contrary, we believe that we must work at a re-foundation of the whole library organization, which cannot wait any longer. Briefly, we must create a national network - in a position to connect with those of other countries - dedicated to the exchange of bibliographic information and founded on both general and special libraries. A unique network, a great infrastructure to be used by all citizens and institutions, public and private bodies - to achieve a specific purpose. In Italy this network is being designed and implemented by the National Library Service.

The main theme of this conference "Health Information for all", is so wide as to stimulate cooperation between health and public libraries in order to go beyond the present situation. And it is through the National Library Service, which seems to be a perfect container of total general information, that the exchange between social health demands and research answers can be made. I hope that the work of this conference is fruitful and that this meeting will be an important step in the implementation of new cooperative and integrated links between bibliographic and librarian services. The Regione, who wanted to host this meeting because of its characteristics of novelty, spending much energy and money to make it possible, is going to launch today a cooperation programme which will not end with the Conference but will begin a long common journey on which we invite all participants to join us."

Professor Hertner, in bringing greetings from L'Institut Universitaire européen, from the Commission des Communautés européennes and from the Conseil de l'Europe, referred to "la réalisation de "l'Europe des chercheurs", un des buts majeurs de la Communauté européenne dans la perspective du grand marché intérieur, en 1992. C'est aussi une des préoccupations permanentes du Conseil de l'Europe dans ses travaux sur la politique de recherche et de développement technologique." He then presented the CEC action plan for libraries.

Signor Manzoli, in his welcome address, said:

I am particularly glad to welcome you ladies and gentlemen, authorities and colleagues coming from all over the world in our town for this very important Conference of Medical Libraries. The choice of Centro di Ricerca Codivilla for the Conference is an honour and underlines the commitment of our administration in supporting the process of scientific education in every aspect.

Original contributions to knowledge and the evolution of the philosophical and scientific thought have gone hand in hand with a diffusion of knowledge both as information and comparison: two steps of one process. The introduction to d'Alembert's famous Encyclopaedia (1751-1772) with the research of the unitarian principle of the classification of human sciences and the indication of the correlations between reason, imagination and memory still represent a cultural, philosophical and scientific bedrock of undiminished validity.

The reconstruction of such a process in the biomedical field can be simple and pleasant in our Institute, since we have pleasure in housing - and we would like you to see it - a real jewel of historical science, the Putti Donation, which comprises one of the most prestigious collections of rare medical books; originals of the works by Bartisch, Vesalio, Avicenna, Rolando, Fracastoro can be found as well as sixteenth century editions of the works by Hippocrates and Galen.

The extension of our Research Centre with seven large laboratories for applied research involved certain difficulties in the diffusion, exchange and comparison of biomedical knowledge although Istituto Rizzoli already has a library with monographs and more than 250 scientific magazines, representing one of the most important collections in the field of Orthopaedics.

However the cultural and technical growth of the staff in most scientific libraries must be sided by an effective formative and informative action on users. The formative side of the problem is not only technical but also methodological. A bibliographical research not only implies principles of classification but also and above all the methodology of the research in order to select the correct answer among the hundreds on offer. We need this methodology of scientific research for ourselves, our staff, student librarians or we may face a dispersion of competence and promotional and organizational efforts.

We thank you for your attention, for your commitment, for the experiences you come to share with us: it is of the utmost importance in this process of exchange. While thanking you for your valuable and unique support and congratulating the promoters and organizers of this Conference I am glad to wish you a most fruitful work for the development of your Association, themes and cooperation.

Mrs Colaianni suggested three roles for medical libraries. Firstly, to provide the best possible information service to health professionals and to advocate for quality health information services. Secondly, to help other medical libraries, because no one library can have all the resources that its users need. A functional network of medical libraries over the entire world, linking the world's resources in health information should be formed, and this Conference provides an opportunity to build relationships. The third role is to preserve today's information and what we have inherited from the past, by preserving documents, and using microfilm and electronic document storage.

Carolyn Murphy reminded the participants that regional target 35, of the WHO's global strategy for Health for All, states that before 1990 member states should have health information systems capable of supporting their national strategies. This has been taken up with enthusiasm by the European countries, with the result that there is a great demand for more information.

The Regional Office for Europe has set up a pilot project to develop an automated bibliographic database (EURODOC), which is available online, and now needs to establish a network of users throughout Europe.

Marc Walckiers, as Chairman of the European Organizing Committee, welcomed the 500 colleagues from most of the European countries and from the four other continents who participated in this Second European Conference of Medical Libraries under the theme:

"Health for all - a common goal"

He said that this Conference was an excellent opportunity to exchange experiences, to strengthen cooperation and to make the best use of the new technologies for improving health information services throughout Europe, according to the aims of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries.

Mr Walckiers thanked the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization, The European Institutions, the Italian authorities and institutions, other national bodies and all companies and colleagues for their support to this Second Conference of Medical Libraries.

After reading the messages of the Ligue Européenne des Bibliothèques de Recherche and of the (American) Medical Library Association, Mr Walckiers announced the opening of this Second Conference of Medical Libraries.

Stephen Lock, Editor of the British Medical Journal, then gave the keynote address: The professionalisation of information - an editor's view:

The "information explosion" is an illusion. As the number of journals has increased, so has the number of scientists, so that there is a constant ratio of about 17 journals per 1000 physicians. Scientific disciplines tend to split every ten years or so, giving rise to new subdisciplines, which in turn form new specialist journals. As time goes on these specialist journals are unable to cope with all the articles, so the need for another superspecialist journal arises.

Journals aren't static and their content changes with the needs of the readership and the philosophies of the time. General journals, such as the British Medical Journal, used to cover the whole field of medicine, but now publish more review articles for the non-specialist doctor, who needs to have an overall view of the whole field of medicine. The professionalisation of the editor and his activities has meant that papers are submitted to more stringent peer review, statistical aspects have been under closer scrutiny, and better subediting has produced shorter and more lucid articles.

The revenue from subscriptions and advertisements can pay for this kind of professionalisation, but it has also come about for a philosophical reason. When each new discipline starts its own journal, the readership is the same as the authorship. When the discipline has expanded, readers are now in the majority; they don't necessarily understand every article any more, so they need them to be clear, relevant, and accurate. Hence the editor has to change his emphasis to the needs of the reader, and the new process of editing is needed. Editors also form clubs and groups, which then discuss problems and produce guidelines and codes.

The interests of medical editors, medical librarians and information scientists are complementary in providing information for health. The computer, in its widest sense, will help the partnership between editors and information scientists. For example, a structured abstract could be published in a journal and the complete article with the full data issued on a CD-ROM. The new concept of information being circulated as preprints or by telephone conversations instead of formal written publication, could be harnessed by electronic databases mounted on cd-rom, which everybody could access - these would almost certainly be collated and compiled by librarians and information scientists. Printed journals would still be needed, but I see for you all an exciting future of a mixture of the new and the old, which is surely how all of us would want it.

Francesco Pocciari, Director of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, then gave a keynote address on "Biomedical information policy in Italy."

To consider Italian policy in the field of information in general, and biomedical information specifically, occupies at the moment particular attention in Europe. 1992 will mean the free circulation of people, goods, capital and services, including information. Our country is following the guidelines, sharing activities within the EEC framework for technological development and research in the field of applied information and telecommunication in order to meet a wide demand. Within this framework, Italy is represented by Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR), by Ministero per il Coordinamento della Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica, as well as by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità. In the EEC, Italy is particularly involved in various programmes for the development of common market information services (e.g. ESPRIT, RACE, AIM and EUREKA).

Certainly Italy and Istituto Superiore di Sanità will take an active part in the EEC Action Plan for Libraries, according to the strategies which will be discussed in the final plenary session. In Italy, the scientific policy of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità as such has given priority to all relevant information as a multidirectional exchange of knowledge and achievement. This is why the Istituto Superiore di Sanità has one of the richest libraries in Italy and a Documentation Service which is also the MEDLARS centre for our country, as the result of an

agreement between Italy and the USA in 1978.

The promotional activity of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità is available to all of the biomedical community to facilitate access to the most important biomedical literature. Our library, documentary and publishing services actively co-operate with national and international scientific organizations such as the EEC, FAO, OCSE and WHO.

At the same time Istituto Superiore di Sanità takes part in SIGLE (System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe), which aims for rationalization of the dissemination of a particular kind of literature, the so-called grey literature, i.e. preliminary contacts, informal documents, etc.

We are now planning preliminary research on the possibilities of a system of libraries and documentation centres in the field of biomedical research. The idea is to place the Istituto Superiore di Sanità in the position of bibliographical agency and coordinator of a network of libraries and documentation centres in biomedical disciplines operating within the National Health Service and the Universities. Regional and local cooperation, extended to all the country and the National Health Service could be the starting point of our operation.