

TITLE:

Future of Libraries Black, Future of Librarians Bright

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ABSTRACT

Faced by the prospect of countless undergraduates grazing in the Library (or Information Commons) many researchers now take refuge in their offices, accessing electronic journals and open archives, and never have to cross the threshold of the Library. Having survived the passing of several millennia, and the ravages of Goths and vandals, the concept of the Library as Place now faces its greatest threat of extinction.

This librarian/researcher for one will be pleased to witness such a demise! The bricks and mortar of libraries have done more to constrain our profession within mind-forged manacles than any negative stereotype could ever achieve. Almost without exception all of the roles that have excited the profession and, more importantly, our users in recent years have involved getting out of the library and getting into the users' context. Freed from our own internal self-serving processes we are able to concentrate instead on the business of our organisations and our users – what do they need and how can we best support them?

Truly effective health information specialists do not need a physical library within which to define themselves. A great premium is now being placed on the skills uniquely possessed by health librarians and the contribution that these can make within education, research and clinical practice. Libraries were the most appropriate technology when the academic world was bibliocentric but that world has moved on and the need for physical libraries is now /virtually/ non-existent!