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The first edition of *Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences* was developed due to my frustration with having no textbook for use in my health sciences classes at the University of North Carolina. Jo Anne Boorkman was on the staff of the UNC Health Sciences Library at the time, and she agreed to work with me on producing a textbook that would be a selective guide to the major reference materials in the health sciences. Our model was William Katz’s *Introduction to Reference Sources*, which was the standard text for general reference courses. We developed a plan for the book and presented it to the Medical Library Association’s Books Panel. It was accepted, we went to work, and the first edition was released in 1980. Jo Anne and I have been overwhelmed and gratified by the reception that first edition and subsequent editions have received.

The heart and soul of each of the editions to date, and for those to come, has been and will be the chapter contributors. We attempted to identify those individuals in the profession who had great expertise in the topics that needed to be covered. The list of contributors reads like a veritable who’s who of the profession and of the Medical Library Association. Jo Anne and I are profoundly grateful to each and every one of them for sharing their expertise with several generations of library school students.

A comparison of the latest edition with the first edition will show the tremendous changes that have occurred in health sciences reference. The first edition had only print sources. In later editions we added special chapters on electronic sources. Now *IRSHS* is a fully integrated publication with print and electronic sources together.

My association with the publication ended with the fourth edition and my retirement. Jo Anne and I invited Jeff Huber to join us as a co-editor, and he and Jo Anne have continued the tradition with this new edition. Jeff proved to be the right person at the right time! The new team of Boorkman and Huber, along with Jean Blackwell, has created a fine new edition, again
with a stellar group of contributors. *Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences* is in good hands, and I shall watch subsequent editions with great interest.

I want to pay tribute to Jo Anne Boorkman. Working with her has been a joy, and I want to thank her for her good judgment, her industriousness, her knowledge of the area, and, most of all, for her friendship over the years. She has been the glue that held our endeavors together!

I am grateful for the opportunity that the Medical Library Association gave us in the early days of the publications program. It has been a wonderful experience for me, both personally and professionally!

Fred W. Roper  
Dean Emeritus  
School of Library and Information Science  
University of South Carolina
Preface

Today’s librarians must be prepared to handle a wide variety of health reference requests, drawing upon an ever-expanding range of resources. They may be called upon to assist a medical student in determining the best evidence related to a particular diagnosis, help a consumer answer a drug question, find a good definition of a medical term for a patron, demonstrate the differences among point of care resources to a group of residents, or show a graduate student which databases to search for information on a research topic. Informed and competent reference work is essential to helping clients locate relevant, accurate, and timely information.

Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences, Fifth Edition, explores the nature of reference work and offers the authors’ selections of some of the most important resources for answering questions in this area. The chapters in this guide identify and describe both general titles for answering bibliographic questions and authoritative works specific to the health sciences, which librarians can use to assist their patrons in finding information on medical topics. The recommendations highlight the best works available for answering questions from health professionals, students, researchers, and consumers.

Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences attempts to include a broad cross-section of the types of information that are available today. This fifth edition includes even more Web resources than previous editions, but print sources are still an important component of the library collection and the librarian’s toolkit. Many people hold the misconception that most information is available and accessible via the Web; they use general-purpose search engines even when searching for health information. The informed librarian can guide users to the more specialized Web sites, databases, or print information that will truly address their questions.

Since no consensus exists as to what constitutes “basic works,” the materials included here represent the authors’ candidates for such a list. We have
chosen those tools that librarians may use on a daily basis in reference work in the health sciences—those that may be considered foundation or basic works. Some major specialized works have also been included when appropriate. Emphasis is placed on U.S. publications, although we have also attempted to address Canadian publications and needs. For certain groups of sources (e.g., technical report literature), materials that are considerably broader in scope than the health sciences field alone have been included to help the reader toward a clear understanding of the use of these sources in reference work in the health sciences.

Arrangement of the Material

Each chapter contains a discussion of the general characteristics of the type of source being considered, followed by examples of the most important tools in the area. The annotations have been thoroughly updated to reflect changes since the last edition, and many new listings have been added. Citations indicate the availability of electronic access to print works in addition to listing electronic-only resources.


Part II, “Bibliographic Sources,” includes recommendations that will help the reader verify, locate, and select high-quality works in different formats. Chapter 2, “Bibliographic Sources for Monographs,” focuses on books, while Chapter 3, “Bibliographic Sources for Periodicals,” addresses journals, serials, and magazines.

The significantly expanded Chapter 4, “Indexing, Abstracting, and Digital Database Resources,” examines the rich array of databases now available in the health sciences, providing the author’s perspective on primary and secondary databases. Chapter 5, “U.S. Government Documents and Technical Reports,” highlights the breadth of health information available in government documents and technical reports, while Chapter 6, “Conferences, Reviews, and Translations,” illuminates less familiar but vital categories of information.
Part III, “Information Sources,” offers recommendations that may form the foundation of a health sciences reference collection. Chapter 7, “Terminology,” lists a wide range of medical dictionaries. Chapter 8, “Handbooks and Manuals,” contains scientific data books and compendia as well as popular resources for laboratory methods and clinical decision-making. Chapter 9, “Drug Information Sources,” guides librarians and health care professionals through references on this complex topic. Chapter 10, “Consumer Health Sources,” discusses what has become an important area of collecting and service in many libraries. Chapter 11, “Medical and Health Statistics,” explains the types of statistics that are collected and where readers can find them. Chapter 12, “Directories and Biographical Sources,” explores ways to unearth information about people and organizations, while Chapter 13, “History Sources,” introduces more than thirty new places to find historical facts and knowledge. The final Chapter 14, “Grant Sources,” provides grantsmanship guides, directories, and indexes for health care professionals seeking funding.

The need for health sciences reference work is as great as ever. With the continuing growth of the health care industry and of the number and types of information sources available, librarians will face new opportunities and new issues in health reference.

We hope that this fifth edition of *Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences* will help guide readers in navigating the maze of print and electronic health sciences resources and in the challenges of building and maintaining a current reference collection.
A Brief History of
Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences

In 1979, Fred Roper approached the Medical Library Association’s publications program about writing a text to support a course in health sciences reference that he taught at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s School of Library Science, with the idea that it would be useful for others teaching similar courses at other library schools. The Medical Library Association expressed interest and suggested that there would be a broader audience for such a text among practicing health sciences librarians and for supporting MLA’s CE course in reference resources. At that time, Jo Anne Boorkman was head of public services and head of reference at the Health Sciences Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. Fred asked her to join him as a coeditor in this endeavor. They invited several librarians, some of whom were relatively new to the field and others with a wealth of experience, to participate in this publishing venture. This mix of contributors proved to be a successful collaboration.

In 1980, the first edition appeared and was met with enthusiasm. It became a familiar text for both library school courses and MLA CE courses. It also gained a broader audience than the authors expected among practicing librarians from general academic and public libraries as well as health sciences libraries. The second edition followed four years later and continued to receive acceptance and recognition. With major career moves for both of them to different parts of the country, their goal of regular updates slipped, and the third edition did not appear until 1994. And it was a full ten years later that the fourth edition was published. With the fourth edition being
completed as Fred prepared for retirement, Jeff Huber was invited to serve as one of the editors. The reception of the first four editions of Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences has been most gratifying. It was the editors’ intention to begin work on a fifth edition soon after publication of the fourth edition, to keep the publication up to date to reflect the changes brought on by the growth of the Web and expansion of electronic reference resources. Jo Anne’s plans to retire provided further impetus to complete the fifth edition in a timely fashion. To assist with preparation of the fifth edition, Jean Blackwell was invited to serve as one of the editors and with the hope that she would continue with future editions of this book. A different mix of authors was invited to contribute to this edition for another successful collaboration that is in keeping with the idea originally promoted by Fred and MLA almost thirty years ago.

Many people have played important roles in the production of this fifth edition. The chapter authors have all shared their expertise, experience, and enthusiasm for their respective topics. New authors have revised several chapters from the fourth edition. These authors are indebted to Fred Roper, Jerry Perry, David Howse, Joan Schlimgen, and Amy Butros for the excellent groundwork that they laid for this edition in preparing the chapters in the fifth edition. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

Jeffrey T. Huber
Jo Anne Boorkman
Jean C. Blackwell
July 2007