

Advocacy

Submitted by: **Shelly Warwick, Ph.D.**
 Touro-Harlem Medical Library
shelly.warwick@touro.edu

The health care debate has been in the forefront of policy news. MLA and other library and information groups have been monitoring and weighing in on a variety of issues, including:

- Supporting IFLA's Multicultural Library Manifesto
- Bringing medical library issues to the attention of the new director of the National Institute of Health
- Examining the impact of the Google Book Settlement on health science libraries
- Having members serve on a US House of Representatives Committee on Science and Technology (HCST) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Scholarly Publishing Roundtable on expanding preservation and access for federally funded research
- Advocating for increased funding for the National Library of Medicine.

A full summary of MLA's advocacy activities during the past year can be found at http://www.mlanet.org/members/mla_news/2009/nov_dec_09/leg_up.html.

As you look at the above activities, and other MLA activities throughout the year, a clear picture emerges of the necessary elements for providing adequate access to health information:

- Recognition of health science librarians as important stakeholders and local experts in patient safety initiatives
- Health information technology infrastructure that is up-to-date and continuously updated; a balanced legal

and regulatory framework that facilitates access to information and recognizes the special needs of libraries; the

- Framing of the debate about information use without the use of pejorative terms like "pirate" or "piracy"
- The need for libraries to "reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity at the international, national, and local levels, and thus work for cross-cultural dialogue and active citizenship"
- Adequate funding to support infrastructure, collections, research and outreach.

Perhaps you feel there is nothing much you can do about some of the weighty national issues – but you can do a great deal to enhance the role that health science librarians fulfill and the one they are perceived to play.

- Where possible go beyond the library – volunteer for policy committees.
- Offer to provide research for institutional position papers
- At meetings speak up about how the library can be involved in institution-wide projects.
- Identify possible grants that could have a library component and work with clinical or academic departments on their writing and submission.
- And if this is not possible – just stay *au courant* on the issues. Read this column and read the advocacy updates in MLA News online.

Be prepared to express why an issue is important to libraries, librarians and their users. Your involvement and competence is our best advocacy tool.