

HEALTH AND MEDICAL REFERENCE GUIDELINES: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

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BACKGROUND

The Health and Medical Reference Committee (HMRC), under the American Library Association (ALA) Reference and User Services Association's (RUSA) Reference Services Section (RSS), recently updated RUSA's *Guidelines for Medical, Legal, and Business Responses*. The purpose of the new *Health and Medical Reference Guidelines* is to assist all information services staff in responding to health or medical inquiries, regardless of questions or library type. For staff who rarely answer medical questions, the *Guidelines* are intended to assist them to be prepared and feel confident that they are providing the best possible response. For staff who regularly answer medical questions, the *Guidelines* are intended to ensure that reference skills are well-rounded.

FROM GUIDELINES TO BEHAVIORS

In June 2016 the Health & Medical Reference Committee offered a Discussion Forum at ALA Annual. Co-sponsored by ACRL's Health Sciences Interest Group, the program taught participants how to use the *Guidelines* to train staff how to provide excellent health and medical reference service. The program distributed a PowerPoint presentation, titled *Quick Start Guide to Providing Excellent Health Reference*, in addition to learning activities that could be adapted by any organization or institution as training materials for those answering health and medical reference questions. The bulk of the adaptable presentation took the **GUIDELINES** and translated them into specific **BEST PRACTICES** and reference interview **BEHAVIORS** to help trainers interpret the *Guidelines* for the reference workers they would teach.

TRAINING MADE SIMPLE

The *Quick Start Guide to Providing Excellent Health Reference*, which translates the *Guidelines* into best practices, is meant to be used alongside the *Health and Medical Reference Guidelines* as well as a scenario-based learning activity. *Quick Start Training Activities* encourage the trainer to divide training participants into small groups. Each group is given a reference scenario and several prompts. The groups are asked to use the *Guidelines* to answer the reference question, and to discuss the themes and issues that arise from the particular scenario. All three parts to the training curriculum can be found at the Health and Medical Reference Committee's Website at: <http://www.ala.org/rusa/contact/rosters/rss/rus-rsshmr>.

GUIDELINE

2.2 Staff should use discretion during the reference interview. While it is important to conduct a thorough interview, this should be done in such a way as to minimize discomfort to the user.

2.5 Staff should be welcoming, as asking health related questions can be stressful and/or embarrassing to the library users and the staff.

BEHAVIOR

Provide a safe, private space for reference interviews. Ask if they would like to move to a more private location.

Give patrons your time and attention without distractions.

Eye contact is very important.

Listen attentively.

GUIDELINE

3.2.5 Staff should promote access to health information for all by creating an impartial and non-judgmental environment of inquiry in order to support informed health care decisions.

BEHAVIOR

Practice compassionate neutrality. Avoid statements of judgment.

Be aware of your body language and tone of voice.

Do not judge, give an opinion, or tell the person "It's probably nothing;" validate feelings by focusing on the information.



2001 Business Reference and Services Section of RUSA creates *Guidelines for Medical, Legal & Business Responses*.

2011 RUSA's Reference Services Section forms the Health & Medical Reference Committee and charges it with revising a new set of medical reference guidelines.



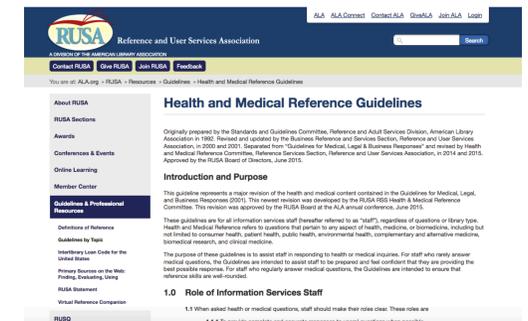
2013-2015 Health & Medical Reference Committee separates content from the *Guidelines for Medical, Legal & Business Responses*, revises it, and writes the new *Health & Medical Reference Guidelines*.



2015 *Health & Medical Reference Guidelines* are approved by RUSA and introduced to the larger library community at ALA Annual.



2016 Health & Medical Reference Committee introduces a curriculum for using the *Health & Medical Reference Guidelines* to train reference workers who answer health sciences questions.



The *Health and Medical Reference Guidelines* can be found online on the RUSA website at <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesmedical>.



Reference Scenario and Prompts

A 92 year old with high blood sugar calls and says her doctor had told her if her next blood sugar was high, they'd have to treat her for diabetes. The doctor said that she should cut out gluten in order to deal with it, but her question was, how much sugar is in strawberries, because she eats a lot of them.

Discussion Prompts

- How would you handle this question?
- Have you had situations like this at your library?
- How do the *Guidelines* inform your response and behavior? Which *Guidelines* apply?
- What issues would arise for a staff member in this scenario?