



VA Library Network (VALNET)

The Veterans Affairs Library Network (VALNET) is a health sciences library network of national significance. Under the One/VA concept, VALNET member libraries support the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration. VALNET libraries and librarians provide knowledge-based information for clinical and management decision-making, research, and education to enhance the quality of care for the more than three million veterans enrolled in the VA Health Care System. VALNET serves a diverse group of users; including VA staff and employees; students and trainees in affiliated teaching programs; and veteran inpatients and outpatients, their families and caregivers.

LIBRARIES IN THE VA SYSTEM

The American Library Association established the VA Library Service as a part-time activity under the Public Health Service during World War I. In 1923, the program became part of the Veterans Bureau, which was the forerunner of the VA. Many library operations were then centralized. After 1940, as individual VA medical centers became more specialized, their libraries became more autonomous. VALNET was established to take advantage of the unique resources available at different VA libraries. Through VALNET, resources available at one library are accessible to users across the entire network. The Library Program Office in VA Central Office offers professional advice and options related to knowledge-based information, and provides a number of centralized services and products to achieve cost-effectiveness and efficiency throughout VALNET.

The VA Health Care System is organized into 21 geographically-distinct Veterans Integrated Networks (VISNs), made up of VA Medical Centers and community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). VALNET libraries are usually located in medical centers, but provide services to CBOCs as well. Most VA medical centers are affiliated with one of the nation's allopathic medical schools. Many are located in large urban areas, while others serve relatively isolated areas.

Due to the unique, clinical, research, and educational mix at each facility, variations exist in the size and scope the library collections in VALNET. In some settings, the physical library is very small, with many services provided electronically. A smaller, more traditional library may be staffed by a nonprofessional, subscribe to a few core medical journal titles, and house a collection of standard health science texts. A larger library may be staffed by a mix of professional librarians, technicians, and clerical personnel, and maintain an extensive collection of journals, monographs, and audiovisual (AV) programs and other multi-media formats, and electronic resources. To improve access to information, VALNET libraries are shifting from largely physical collections to electronic media.

Increasingly, VALNET members are managing more than library and information services. Library staff might, for example, support facilities with large research projects, be responsible for medical media and satellite television programming activities or coordinating programs having national impact, or conduct educational activities for medical center staff.

RESOURCES

The collective resources of VALNET are greater than those many large medical school libraries and offer significant resource-sharing opportunities for users. A Union List subset of OCLC archival tapes provides an online locator catalog of most book and AV titles held by VALNET libraries. Network libraries also maintain a variety of multi-facility arrangements within the system. Libraries in a geographic area or VISN often cooperate in the selection and retention of journal holdings, as well as collection development and interlibrary lending responsibilities. VALNET participates in resource-sharing networks such as local consortia, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, and the DOCLINE network.

Individual VALNET libraries have established a variety of sharing agreements with academic institutions, hospitals, public agencies, Department of Defense facilities, and research centers in their states or local communities. Some libraries participate in Exchange of Medical Information (EMI) agreements, co-sponsor educational activities, and provide print and non-print materials and database searching in exchange for other services.

VALNET staff members communicate through system-wide electronic mail, focused meetings at national and regional conferences, and regular conference calls to discuss common issues or to provide library-specific training. The Library Program Office funds Network database services so that all employees in the network have access to databases not commonly used in a health care setting. Bibliographies on topics of recurring interest are produced centrally and made available on the VALNET website. These bibliographies are used by VALNET, the federal library community, and other interested local libraries.

SERVICES

All VALNET libraries provide reference, online search service, bibliographic, interlibrary loan, and circulation services. Many offer computer-assisted instruction, clinical librarianship, end-user database searching, training in Internet navigation skills, and patient information support. VALNET librarians have automated some or

all of their library operations and, increasingly, are offering their services remotely to employees by providing electronic request forms, full-text reference books and journals, and database search capability at the desktop. Many libraries organize their services on web pages and serve as expert web designers to staff at their facilities.

The Network AV/Print Delivery Program is funded and managed by the Library Program Office. AV programs covering a wide array of topics, are either produced in-house by the VA or purchased from commercial vendors. The programs and selected books are distributed to multi-facility delivery sites for use throughout the network.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

New library managers participate in the Library Management Orientation Program. The program helps first-time VA library managers acquire the skills and knowledge needed to be effective library administrators within VA and to understand, use, and ensure maximum sharing of resources with VALNET. The Medical Library Association recognizes this program as a continuing education activity. Participants receive seven continuing education credits upon completion of the program.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employment services in VA are decentralized, although the Library Program Office is often aware of vacancies. To inquire about a specific vacancy, contact the VA facility of interest directly.

For additional information about VALNET, training opportunities, or employment opportunities, contact:

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