The Outlook for Women in Occupations in the Medical Services

Medical Record Librarians

Bulletin 203, Number 6

United States Department of Labor • Women's Bureau

Frances Perkins, Secretary

Frieda S. Miller, Director
THE OUTLOOK FOR WOMEN IN OCCUPATIONS IN THE
MEDICAL SERVICES

This pamphlet is one of a series prepared by the Women's Bureau to present the post-war outlook for women in particular occupational fields. Many of the 13 million women who were working before the war, as well as some of the 5 million who have joined them since, must continue to support themselves and their many dependents. Like their younger sisters in schools and colleges, they are confused by the sometimes glowing and sometimes dark predictions regarding their future opportunity for employment. They want the facts.

Many monographs are available that describe an occupation at a particular time in its pre-war or wartime setting. But no detailed studies have been published that show the considerable changes that have taken place during the war and the effect of these changes on the post-war supply of and demand for women in particular occupational fields. This pamphlet presents such a dynamic study as distinct from a static description. It discusses the pre-war situation, the wartime changes, and the post-war outlook for women in one of the occupations in the field of medical services, in which women in 1940 composed almost two-thirds of the workers.

Because of the pressing demand for this type of information, some of the occupational discussions in this field are being issued separately as they are completed. An over-all pamphlet will coordinate the series and discuss the general trends affecting the many women employed in these services so important to the Nation whether at peace or at war.
LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,
WOMEN'S BUREAU,
Washington, February 20, 1945.

MADAM: I have the honor of transmitting a summary of the outlook for women as medical record librarians in hospitals and institutions. This report presents the pre-war situation of women in this type of work, reviews the wartime changes, and discusses the future outlook as it can be projected from the experiences of the past and the present.

The study is one of a series prepared by Marguerite Wykoff Zapoleon with the assistance of Elsie Katcher of the Bureau's Research Division. I wish to express my appreciation to the many persons who have contributed to this bulletin by what they have written or said. To those listed on the opposite page, who read all or part of the manuscript or contributed considerably to its content, special acknowledgment is made.

Respectfully submitted.

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Representatives of Organizations and Agencies Whose Special Assistance Is Gratefully Acknowledged

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Medical record librarian at work on discharge records and service analysis
The Medical Record Librarian as Defined by Grace Whiting Myers of the American Association of Medical Record Librarians (4)¹

Medical Record Librarian—one in full charge of the medical, or clinical records of a hospital; cataloguing and filing same, assisting physicians and other accredited persons in using them for purposes of medical research, or other lawful requirement; also compiling medical and surgical statistics.

The Duties of a Medical Record Librarian as Stated by the American Hospital Association (1)

Under administrative supervision, to have charge of the Medical Record Department; and to perform related work as required. Examples are: Supervising the Medical Record Department; making reports concerning admissions, births, transfers, discharges, or deaths of patients; briefing and transcribing case histories and records; supervising the indexing and coding of diagnoses, both primary and secondary, of all medical records and histories of hospital patients according to a standard nomenclature; checking all histories to ascertain whether they are complete; checking histories in and out and keeping a record of them.

¹ References in parentheses throughout this report are to Appendix C—"Sources to Which Reference Is Made in the Text," p. 8.
As hospitals have improved their techniques, another occupation has emerged in which women are employed almost exclusively, that of keeping the clinical records of patients. In 1918 less than 100 hospitals in the United States kept medical records worthy of the name. 1 The remaining 5,000 hospitals had little information on patients beyond notes made by nurses. Today, in every hospital approved by the American College of Surgeons there is a medical chart and a medical record for every patient. The completeness and accuracy of these records depend not only on the physicians and nurses who attend the patient, but on those who check over and maintain their record of the patient's history and the progress of his treatment.

The responsibility for supplying stenographic aid to the physician for this recording as well as the responsibility for the briefng and transcribing of these records, for preparation of reports for which they supply the raw materials, and for the care and immediate availability of each record rests with the "medical record librarian." This name, well understood in medical circles, is likely to be confused elsewhere with the medical librarian who has charge of the library in a hospital or medical institution and has nothing whatever to do with the patients' records.

The medical record librarian is essentially a highly responsible registrar, who can also take medical dictation. Because of the technical nature of the records and the vital importance of their accuracy, specially selected and specially trained personnel are now preferred for this work. Record clerks may assist them with the filing, which composes at least 50 percent of the work. Until recently training was available only on an apprenticeship basis, but 10 schools now offer a training course approved by the American Medical Association. Most approved hospitals require those in charge of their records to be trained and prefer those who are registered.

Pre-war Number and Distribution of Medical Record Librarians

As early as 1928, an Association of Medical Record Librarians was formed, consisting of 53 charter members. In 1932, a registry was established by this association in cooperation with the American Medical Association. In 1941, before the war, more than 1,000 medical record librarians were registered and there were 952 active members in the Association. At the same time, more

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2 Not to be confused with the medical librarian in a medical library.
than 3,000 women were reported to be engaged full time in this work in registered hospitals and another group of almost 1,000 were working part time (3). The largest number (1,029) of those working full time were in hospitals in the northeastern States, where both hospitals and population are most numerous. Southern hospitals, and those in the north-central States, employed about 800, while about half that number were working in hospitals in the West. Part-time workers were most numerous in small hospitals in the north-central and southern States. In veterans' hospitals a "clinical clerk," and in Public Health Service hospitals and in Army hospitals a "registrar," was in charge of medical records, usually having been advanced to this position after long experience as typist, stenographer, or clerk.

Between 20 and 30 trained women a year were graduating from schools approved for the training of medical record librarians. This number was not enough to replace those withdrawing from the work.

**Wartime Changes**

The number of medical records to be prepared and maintained increased during the war with the number of patients admitted. Three and three-quarters million more patients entered hospitals in 1943 than in 1941, a 33-percent increase over the 11 ½-million patients admitted in the pre-war year. The number of medical record librarians increased proportionately. In 1943, more than 4,000 were employed full time, a third more than in 1941. Part-time workers, too, numbered more than a thousand (3). Many of these part-time workers are employed in small hospitals and some of them serve also as secretaries or perform other duties. As might be expected, more than a thousand of those working full time were employed in Federal hospitals, which expanded greatly during the war in response to military needs. The remaining three-fourths were employed in civilian institutions under State or local government auspices or under private control. In March 1944, estimates placed the need for additional registered medical record librarians at 1,500 (2). This number corresponded with the total number of registered medical record librarians in 1943.

The organized training of medical record librarians did not get under way until the decade preceding the war. Only 4 schools were approved by the American Association of Medical Record Librarians in 1935. The schools that appeared on the first approved list of the American Medical Association in June 1943 did not have the capacity to train all the additional numbers hired during the war period. Their maximum enrollment ranges from 2 to 16 students and their combined capacity is only 90 (5). In 1943, 27 students were graduated. Obviously, then, the additional thousand who went into this work between 1941 and 1943, like many of the group employed previously, were not graduates of approved schools. Many of them were high-school
graduates or college girls with stenographic training who had to be trained on
the job by experienced or registered personnel. During this period, some of
the experienced group enrolled in special short courses offered in approved
schools to prepare them for registration examinations.

No special training programs have been developed as a result of the war.
In 1944, the additional personnel needed for unfilled positions in registered
hospitals was only 20 percent more than existing personnel and could be
trained more quickly than, for example, physical and occupational therapists,
who were needed at the rate of 80 percent of the existing personnel (6). No
special wartime financial inducements to take training were offered. One
scholarship of $150 is available through the American Association of Medical
Record Librarians. Tuition in approved schools varies from $90 to $315 a
year (5).

Though there are no supporting statistics, turn-over is believed to be rela-
tively low. In spite of the inevitably routine character of much of the work,
the environment, the satisfactions derived from service, and the responsibility
involved in the work make it possible to retain high-grade personnel for long
periods of service.

Earnings, Hours, and Advancement

The average monthly salary for medical record librarians throughout the
United States in 1941 was $110, according to the Hospital Yearbook of 1942
(8). An allowance for the value of maintenance was included in computing
this average in cases where maintenance as well as a cash salary was offered.
The average salary offered during the war is believed to approximate $140 a
month, generally with part maintenance included.

Hours are comparable to those in other offices, usually 8 a day and 40 to 48
a week. During the war period, overtime has been more frequent than formerly.

Advancement lies in supervisory work. For example, the record department
of a large hospital with a good-sized out-patient department would employ
25 to 35 persons whose supervision and training fall to the head of the depart-
ment, a trained and experienced medical record librarian who would need at
least 2 trained medical record librarians to assist her, in addition to the clerical
personnel.

Opportunities for Women With Special Employment Problems

Mature women, conscious of their responsibility for accurate records, were
employed by hospitals for this work at the start when record systems were
introduced. Nurses often were chosen because of their special training and
hospital experience. Most of those now engaged in this work are between 25
and 45 years of age. Those who grow older on their jobs experience no
difficulty in retaining them, since their experience makes them increasingly valuable and more than compensates for decreasing physical vigor. However, some older ones may find it difficult to change jobs, especially if they have not become registered medical record librarians. Marriage presents no unusual handicap to women who want to continue in this occupation.

Negro women are employed in some of the Negro hospitals and a few are trained for this work at the Geo. W. Hubbard Hospital of Meharry Medical College in Tennessee.

Since records must be handled quickly and accurately, speed of hand and good vision are important. Also, record rooms often are crowded and some file cabinets high, so that a ladder is frequently used in filing. However, if others on the staff are available for this type of activity, a physical handicap not interfering with capacity for desk work and regular attendance on the job would not hinder an individual in the performance of this work.

**Post-war Outlook**

As the science of medicine progresses, as new treatments develop, the record-keeping function becomes more and more significant. Hospital records supply much of the raw material on which medical research and further progress depend. They also furnish a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the hospital and its staff and the extent of their progress. Monthly and annual statistics on admissions, births, deaths, beds occupied, and so forth, compiled from the records of hospitals throughout the country, are needed and used to indicate national progress and problems in this vital area of medical service. Disease and other cross-indexes maintained by the medical record librarian permit the assembling of data related to specific phases of diagnosis and treatment of which special study is planned. For these reasons, as already noted, the trend prior to the war was toward greater emphasis on the preparation and maintenance of thorough and accurate records of patients, and therefore toward an increase in the demand for specially trained personnel.

This steady trend will continue during the post-war years, augmented by the increase in patients in veterans' hospitals and the increasing number of admissions in civilian hospitals. Even before the war — in the 5-year period ending in 1940 — as more and more persons sought hospital care during illness, new admissions were increasing at the rate of almost half a million a year. There is every evidence that new admissions will continue to grow with increased hospitalization insurance and other factors tending to increase medical care.

According to recent estimates, approximately 2,811 medical record librarians (in addition to helpers) are needed to properly staff general hospitals alone (2). The increasing out-patient work of hospitals also requires more personnel to maintain the records of patients treated in clinics and dispensaries. The
growing tendency to unify hospital records with out-patient department records is adding to the demand for competent, well-prepared personnel.

Medical record librarian supplies stenographic service to record surgical data

The thousand additional workers thus far employed during the war, plus several hundred more workers, should have no difficulty in retaining their posts after the war if they have done their work well and have really been "trained on the job." Those who supplement this training with special short courses offered in approved schools will be well prepared to take advantage of opportunities for supervisory work. Those who plan to enter this work after the war will find it desirable to take an approved course or at least to meet the standards for entrance to an approved course before seeking an apprentice-training arrangement. High-school graduates will find it difficult, except for the less desirable jobs, to meet the competition of specially trained personnel, of college girls, and of nurses who sometimes enter this work because it is less strenuous physically than nursing and yet related to their training and experience.
APPENDIX A

I. Requirements for Entrance to a School for Training Medical Record Librarians Approved by the American Medical Association

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<td>list of approved schools in this field, but the American Association</td>
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<td>of Medical Record Librarians maintained a list prepared by its Educa-</td>
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<td>tional Board. Since 1938, the following have been required for entrance</td>
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<td>to approved schools:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proficiency in shorthand and typing.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion of 2 years of accredited college work or graduation from a</td>
<td>No change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>recognized school of nursing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-school graduates are accepted for a 4-year course leading to a</td>
<td>No change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>college degree offered at 3 of the schools.</td>
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<th>Wartime Changes</th>
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II. Requirements for Graduation From a School for Medical Record Librarians Approved by the American Medical Association

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<td>tional Board. Since 1938, the following have been the requirements for</td>
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<tr>
<td>graduation from an approved school:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion of not less than 36 weeks of practical hospital experience,</td>
<td>No change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>including—</td>
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<td>(a) Not less than 155 clock-hours of theoretical instruction covering:</td>
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<td>Anatomy and physiology; medical terminology; hospital and medical</td>
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<tr>
<td>ethics; fundamental principles and practices of medical record library</td>
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<td>science.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(b) Practical training in filing of records, the mechanism of admission</td>
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<tr>
<td>and discharge of patients, the methods of cataloging, medical dictation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>observation of clinical procedures and dictation, and out-patient</td>
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<td>department records. Additional experience in the handling of records</td>
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<td>in the pathology and radiology departments is recommended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A 4-year degree course for high-school graduates includes the above</td>
<td>No change.</td>
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<td>plus college background subjects.</td>
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III. Requirements for Registration by the Registry of the American Association of Medical Record Librarians

**Pre-war**

- 21 years of age, ethical, and of good moral character.
- Graduation from a school for record librarians approved by the American Association of Medical Record Librarians, or
- Preliminary high-school education, plus experience as chief record librarian in an approved hospital for a period of not less than 3 out of the past 5 years, or experience as assistant record librarian in an approved hospital for a period of not less than 5 years.
- Must be actively engaged in record work.
- An examination satisfactorily passed, covering the subject matter used in the hospital record work.

**Wartime Changes**

No change.

IV. Requirements for Active Membership in the American Association of Medical Record Librarians

**Pre-war**

- For active membership, experience of 2 years as chief medical record librarian in an approved hospital, or 3 years as assistant medical record librarian in an approved hospital.
- For junior membership, experience of 1 year as chief medical record librarian in an approved hospital, or 2 years as assistant medical record librarian in an approved hospital, or graduation from an approved training school for record librarians and employment in the record department of an approved hospital.

**Wartime Changes**

No change.

**APPENDIX B**

Schools for Medical Record Librarians Approved by Council on Medical Education and Hospitals of American Medical Association, March 1944

- Samuel Merritt Hospital, Oakland, Calif.
- Grant Hospital, Chicago, Ill.
- St. Joseph Hospital, Chicago, Ill.
- Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Mass.
- *College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, Minn.
- *St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.
- Rochester General Hospital, Rochester, N. Y.
- Duke Hospital, Durham, N. C.
- Graduate Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.

* Offers degree courses.
APPENDIX C

Sources to Which Reference Is Made in the Text


(2) 1,500 MRL Needed. Bulletin of American Association of Medical Record Librarians 15:59, March 1944.


Other Selected References on the Medical Record Librarian


Bulletin of the American Association of Medical Record Librarians. Published quarterly. 161 W. Harrison St., Chicago 5, Ill.

Catholic Hospital Association of the United States and Canada. Selected Bibliographies on Various Phases of Medical Records. St. Louis, Mo., the Association, May 1944. 13 pp. (mimeo.)

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Taylor, Margaret C. Relationship of the Medical Record Librarian to Internes Training Program. Hospital Management 57:97-99, January 1944.

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