Preservation of Overlook Hospital Historical Materials for the Mulreany Health Sciences Library in Summit, NJ

Executive Summary

The Mulreany Health Sciences Library of Overlook Hospital, located in Summit, NJ, proposes to archive the hospital's collection of historical records from the hospital's nursing program. This collection contains hundreds of photographs, fifty nursing school yearbooks, fifteen scrapbooks of newspaper articles about the nursing school, and one nurse's cape. This collection dates back to the founding of the hospital in 1906 and is a visual history which must be archived, preserved, digitized, and displayed to the members of the community. The library is requesting a grant of 40,000 dollars over an eight month period from September 6, 2009 through May 6, 2010 when this project will be completed. The collection will be formally presented on May 6, 2010, which is National Nurses Day, in celebration of Overlook's nurses' contribution to the community.

Background

Community

The Mulreany Health Sciences Library serves a community with broad needs. This community includes medical professionals, hospital patients, their families, and the general public. The library is housed in Overlook Hospital which is part of the Atlantic Health System. As a 504 bed hospital, Overlook is home to a comprehensive stroke center, cancer center, cardiovascular
institute, and a renowned pain management center. Overlook provides cutting edge medical care with a focus on patient safety.

Library

Located directly off the main hospital lobby, the library is central to the day-to-day life of the hospital community. The library’s collection of over 27,000 items and subscriptions includes a range of books, professional medical journals, consumer health information magazines and newsletters, audiovisual programs, database subscriptions, and free Internet access. In serving the needs of busy healthcare professionals, the library has provided the hospital staff with access to all library databases from every hospital computer located on all hospital floors, ensuring that up-to-date information is right at the staff’s fingertips. The library is also accessible to staff members and volunteers twenty-four hours a day seven days a week in order to accommodate the needs of shift workers. The “Consumer Library Information Prescription (CLIP)” program enables any healthcare provider to write an “information prescription” for a patient, for example a newly diagnosed diabetic, to be “filled” by the library. Even patients themselves can write an “information prescription” (Atlantic Health).

Patrons

As keeping patients informed is part of the hospital's patient safety goals, patients and their families are key patrons of the library, and computer access to the library's resources are provided in all patient rooms. In addition, the library helps to keep medical staff up-to-date on the latest in cutting edge care. Among the medical staff, nurses are frequent library patrons. Currently the hospital is working to attain Magnet hospital status which is awarded to hospitals
with superior nursing performance. As part of this application process, all nurses are required to participate in evidence-based research to improve patient outcomes, making the library an indispensable resource.

Staff

Working to meet community needs, the library staff consists of the library manager, a full-time library assistant, several volunteers, and one part-time librarian who is a certified archivist and will thus be in charge of this archive project. Hospital administration has pledged to turn the part-time librarian position into a full-time position to oversee the project in recognition of the “..long standing institutional commitment” required to maintain these archives (Bansal, Kumari, Kumar, & Singh, 2005).

Statement of Need

Historical hospital archives are items that represent the past, provide insight into a time before, and through their study, have the power to enlighten today's generation. Overlook's collection represents over one hundred years of nursing service, provides insight into the development of the hospital's current nursing program, will inspire today's nurses, and it provides an unmatched learning opportunity. Since 1906, nurses at Overlook Hospital have been held to a high standard which led the hospital to establish the Overlook Hospital Training School for Nursing in 1912. After decades of meeting the community's need for trained nurses, especially throughout historical periods such as WWII when there were hospital nursing shortages, Overlook's hospital based nursing school permanently closed its doors in 1979. Though the hospital's nursing school has closed, it is a part of the rich history of nursing care at Overlook. From the hospital's
founding nurses in 1906 who sought to better patient care by establishing the nursing training school, to today's nurses who are seeking to better patient care by working to attain the nursing recognition of Magnet status, Overlook's nurses have shared a powerful dedication to their patients for over a century. These photographs represent this untiring commitment throughout the ages and are a source of pride for the entire hospital, and should be displayed. The feelings of pride fostered by such collections are universal and their importance has been written about in the scholarly literature- “Early twentieth-century photograph albums stored among nursing and social work files captured and preserved evidence of departmental cohesion, sisterhood, and pride for future generations of nurses...” (Mifflin, 2007).

These photographs, yearbooks, newspaper albums and nurse's cape are irreplaceable archives of this former school, and these archives are part of the community's collective history. Since the nursing school's early days, the Summit community has understood and appreciated the role of nurses in their lives and community. In an article published on May 3, 1918 in the newspaper the Summit Record, the ties between Overlook nurses and the community are clear, as the article states “Summit residents, since the establishment of the training school for nurses at Overlook Hospital, have always manifested a deep interest in its progress ...” (Overlook Hospital, 2006). The community still has close ties with Overlook's nurses, and the nursing archives will be celebrated by both the hospital community and the greater community it serves.

In addition to their innate value as cultural material, these archives are unique educational materials. Medical photographs, such as the hundreds that the library seeks to archive, can reveal information about previous approaches to patient care. For example, operating room photographs contain unique information about surgical procedures, and photographs of hospital wards contain
unique information about patient/bed assignments from “bygone eras” (Mifflin, 2007). Another practical educational application of historical medical photographs that has been documented in the literature, is their use in portraying symptoms of diseases that have been eradicated, thanks to modern medical advancements (Mifflin). This is also true of former treatment methods that are no longer performed, again as a result of medical advancements. A clear understanding of the path that healthcare has taken is necessary as everyday healthcare continues to take steps into its future.

Overlook Hospital's collection is currently residing in a hospital closet. The climate is not properly controlled for archives, the yearbook pages are brittle and yellowing and the photographs are also brittle, yellow and often contain unidentified figures. This collection needs to be properly sorted, preserved, digitized, labeled and displayed for the benefit of the community. In addition to the cultural and educational value that has been locked in a closet, this collection is literally disintegrating. It is urgent that these irreplaceable unique items not be lost, but rather that they are preserved and displayed.

**Proposed Program**

**Project Goals and Materials Needed**

The first project goal is to preserve and digitize the photograph collection. Once digitized, a website will be created so that the public can help to identify those in the pictures. This will get the entire community involved in the project. As the photographs are currently unprotected and piled in boxes in a closet that is not climate controlled, it is vital that these photographs first be preserved to prevent further damage to them. The photographs will be placed in suitable plastic
enclosures, for example uncoated polyester film (Norris, 2007). Plastic enclosures will protect the photographs while still allowing the community to view them. Then the photographs must be sorted and digitized. The preservation and sorting of the photographs will be done by Mulreany library's staff librarian who is a certified archivist and heading up the project. Given the hundreds of photographs which are the backbone of this collection, this preservation requires the purchase of ten Mylar polyester film rolls. The digitization of the collection is to be completed by the renowned Northeast Documentation Conservation Center (NEDCC). The NEDCC's Imaging department has a climate-controlled facility, years of experience in digitization, is a digital preservation training leader, and has an experienced and credentialed staff to properly handle historical materials. Once digitized, the website of the unidentified hospital photographs will be launched in order to get community input. The preservation is to be completed over the course of one month (September 6- October 6). Then the photographs will be sent out to be digitized and linked to the hospital website for identification by the community, which will take an estimated two months (October 6-December 6). The website photograph identification will be an ongoing project run by the library.

The second project goal is to protect the fifty nursing school yearbooks from further environmental damage by placing acid-free tissue paper between the pages and storing them in acid-free boxes (Northeast Document Conservation Center [NEDCC], 2007). Again these yearbooks have been stored in poor conditions for decades and are already showing signs of damage, including worn bindings and brittle pages. This task will be accomplished by the project leader using twenty-five rolls of acid-free tissue paper and fifty acid-free boxes. This is expected to be completed over the course of one month (October 6-November 6).
The third project goal is to photocopy the material from the fifteen scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings onto acid-free paper and place them in acid free boxes for preservation and storage (Library of Congress [LOC], 2008). The current condition of these clippings is too fragile for them to be used. This photocopying will also be done by the project leader in accordance with the American Library Association's preservation photocopying guidelines. This will require three reams of acid-free paper and fifteen acid-free boxes. This extensive project will take three months (November 6-February 6).

The fourth goal involves the one nurse's cape in the collection that has been hanging in the closet completely unprotected. This cape was a part of a nurse's uniform dating to the 1960s. This cape needs to be preserved in a display case shadow box with an acid-free mounting board, UV resistant glass and a rust resistant frame (Frisina, 2000). This involves the purchase of one display case- which will preserve the garment while also allowing the community access to this archive. This will take one month (February 6-March 6).

The fifth goal involves converting a room located within the library which is currently extra office spaces, into a climate controlled exhibition and storage room for the collection. Climate control involving “Control of temperature and relative humidity is critical in the preservation of library and archival collections because unacceptable levels of these contribute significantly to the breakdown of materials” (Ogden, 2007). This will be completed in conjunction with the hospital's experienced engineering department with consultation from an environmental specialist through the NEDCC. The hospital's engineering department has years of experience in creating extremely specific environmental controls for medical care. The control will focus on maintaining the temperature seventy degrees or below, and keeping relative humidity between
thirty to fifty percent (Ogden). Further consultation is needed in controlling light sources and air quality to optimally preserve these archives. This renovation will begin immediately with the goal of completion for the May 6, 2010 ceremony.

Finally, as this collection portrays a history of nursing care, this collection will be displayed to the community in a library ceremony on May 6, 2010 which is National Nurses Day. This ceremony will highlight the collection, mark Nurses Day, and serve to recognize the nurses who are currently working so hard in pursuit of Magnet status. The Nursing Morale Committee has raised $5,000 for this event. The responsibility to preserve these archives falls on the shoulders of the Mulreany Health Sciences Library as “Libraries have been described as having the long-range responsibility to document our times” (Pymm 2006). Mulreany library seeks to embrace this calling and challenge.

Project evaluation centers on the library meeting the goals that it has set forth. First, all of the material is expected to be archived and stored in the newly renovated climate control library room by May 6, 2010. The library ultimately anticipates a seventy-five percent increased use of the library and website, as the identification project involves hospital members, patients, and the community at large. Second, the library anticipates a twenty-five percent increase in nursing research as a result of access to the collection. These increases will be measured on a weekly basis by library staff. Third, the library will evaluate the success of the opening ceremony in terms of attendance that represents all members of the community, including doctors, nurses, former hospital patients, and members of the larger community.

**PROPOSED BUDGET**

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<td>10 Mylar Enclosures</td>
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<td>Digitization of Photographs by NEDCC</td>
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### Conclusion

In seeking to archive these historic materials, the Mulreany Health Science Library seeks to preserve a part of the hospital's history- the history of Overlook nursing. These records provide a unique picture of the growth and development of the nursing program which has been the heart of Overlook for over one hundred years. Patients respond to, connect with, and remember their nurses. In addition, these records need to be saved to enrich the community's culture and to provide unparalleled educational opportunities. Displaying these materials in the library's collection will truly connect today's hospital with its past history of providing patient care.

### References


Minnesota Historical Society Web site:


http://www.loc.gov/preserv/care/newspap.html


http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets/4Storage_and_Handling/04StorageEnclosures.php


**Appendix of Pertinent Materials**

A. Completed inventory of hospital historical materials

B. Resumes of key personnel, including Mulreany's Health Sciences Library's librarian and certified archivist who will lead the project

C. Northeast Documentation Conservation Center's credentials to digitize photographs

D. Northeast Documentation Conservation Center's assessment of digitization of photographs-cost and time frame, including website application

E. Display Case description

F. Northeast Documentation Conservation Center consultant's resume for climate-controlled room
G. Northeast Documentation Conservation Center's climate controlled room assessment and recommendations

H. Overlook Hospital's engineering department's qualifications to completed climate-controlled room conversion, including resumes of key engineers and previous projects completed

I. Plans for Nurses Day Ceremony as sponsored by the Nursing Morale Committee

J. American Library Association's preservation photocopying guidelines