



# Canadian Health Libraries Association Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada

Dr, Azim Gangji, MD, VP education

Re : St Joseph's Healthcare (Hamilton) Library

Dear Dr. Gangji,

I recently learned that St. Joseph's Healthcare has made significant changes to its library services, and I wanted to take this opportunity to reach out to you in my role as President of the Canadian Health Libraries Association / Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada (CHLA/ABSC). I know that your organization prides itself on being a "premier academic and research healthcare organization", and you should be aware of the impacts that these changes will have on St. Joseph's Healthcare staff and patients, and St Joe's relationship to other institutions in the Hamilton area.

Hospital libraries not only provide access to reliable information for practice and research, library staff also provide services that save healthcare workers time which is better spent caring for patients than struggling to find high-quality information. International research has demonstrated, time and again, that health library services have a positive impact on patient care, including shortening patients' stay in hospital, reducing patient readmissions, and improving safety for both patients and staff.

- In 2020, an [independent review of the NHS library service](#) in the United Kingdom reported that their health library services were "delivering a **net economic benefit of £77m per annum**" [emphasis added] after the costs of running the library service were taken into account. "Moreover, this includes only the benefits of time saving and expense, not the value of improvement to patient care, safety and operational efficiencies."
- Closer to home, [a landmark study published in 2013](#) asked over 16,000 health care professionals in the US and Canada to think of "an occasion in the last six months when you looked for information for patient care that was not available in the patient record, electronic medical record (EMR) system, or lab results".
  - 95% of respondents agreed that access to health information through their library 'resulted in a better informed clinical decision' and 'contributed to higher quality of care'
  - 13% reported an avoidance in misdiagnosis and adverse drug reactions thanks to their library service
  - 12% reported a reduction in medication errors; and
  - 6% reported an avoidance of patient mortality

I encourage you to review the [CHLA standards for library and information services in Canadian health & social services institutions 2020](#) to get a sense of the minimum requirements for effective hospital library services.

If library services are interrupted at St. Joseph's Healthcare, a relatively small number of employees can draw on faculty affiliations for library service but the majority of front-line staff will not be able to rely on libraries at other institutions in the Hamilton area to fill the gap. Staff in these libraries are focused

on serving their own clientele, and must prioritize them over providing service as a courtesy to unaffiliated individuals. Some administrative staff may be able to use their McMaster credentials to access library content from the University, but due to licensing restrictions they will be unable to share materials with unaffiliated hospital staff without risking a violation of the codes of conduct relevant to their role at the University. When libraries enter into licensing agreements for resources like research journals, ebooks, and clinical decision making tools, they become subject to legally binding contracts that outline who is entitled to access those resources. Unauthorized sharing of such resources with unaffiliated individuals at other institutions, like St. Joseph's healthcare, would be unethical and potentially open the licensing organizations to legal repercussions.

Libraries across the country, and the organizations they serve, are facing heavy workloads and harsh budgetary realities. St. Joseph's Healthcare's mission is to "provide dynamic research, revolutionary methods in health sciences education, and the highest standard of clinical care in a spirit of compassion, innovation and commitment." The library services portion of your website states that the St. Joseph's Healthcare Library is "the leading provider of information and indispensable partner to the physicians, hospital staff and learners in their pursuit of excellence in education, clinical care, research, and community service." Given your commitment to quality healthcare delivery and research excellence, and in light of the changes to your library service, I am hopeful that you have developed a plan to ensure that all St. Joseph's Healthcare employees will continue to have equitable access to the resources needed to fulfill your mission.

Sincerely,



Amanda Ross-White

President, Canadian Health Libraries Association/Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada

*Cc - Leslie Steinberg, Director of Education*

*Sarah Howe, Chief Operating Office*

*Dr. Lehana Thabane, Scientific Director*

*Joanna Frketich, Hamilton Spectator*