

Spatz, Michele. *Answering consumer health questions: the Medical Library Association guide for reference librarians*. New York, NY : Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc, 2008. 142 p. \$65.00. ISBN: 978-1-55570-632-6

Answering consumer health questions can be some of the most challenging and intimidating questions for any librarian to answer, especially if they do not have a medical background. What is the best way to provide this information for your users – do the searching yourself or do it for them? How do you handle conveying much needed information to a patron who may or may not be emotionally ready to receive it? How do you handle your own emotions? How do you prevent yourself from burning out?

Spatz has written a very useful guide for reference librarians in any setting – public, medical, or solo -- who are called upon to provide information about consumer health questions whether on desk, over the phone or via virtual reference. Her book is written such that any librarian or information professional without a medical background could understand it. She uses no medical jargon, and addresses all consumer health patron issues ranging from children through adult. She stresses the importance of practicing compassionate neutrality, the “art of absorbing the full context of what a patron tells you without judgment, criticism, or pity,... hearing what the user tells you, acknowledging [their] feelings, and then doing your job” (pg. 23).

The book features a table of contents, preface, list of exhibits and appendices, index, and author information. The table of contents provides a comprehensive breakdown of each chapter. Each chapter ends with a summary, additional reading, and references. Where applicable, the chapters may contain exhibits, such as sample disclaimers, rules of patron conduct, and policies. A treasure trove of current websites are included, too.

Having established the Planetree Health Resource Center in The Dalles, Oregon, in 1991, Spatz now serves as its current director. Planetree Health Resource Center is a community-based consumer health library for the Mid-Columbia Medical Center. Spatz also served as past president of the Oregon Health Sciences Libraries Association, and as a former chair of the Consumer and Patient Health Information Section of the Medical Library Association.

Carol Luallin, MLS
Reference Librarian
Arapahoe Library District