

Editor's Note

Dr. Brenda Dervin died on December 31, 2022. Brenda and I were classmates and friends in the 1960's when we were both pursuing our doctoral degree in the Department of Communication at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan.

Dr. Dervin is best known for her work on Sense-Making Methodology which in the simplest terms is a theoretical approach that focuses on how people make sense of information and the world around them. See [1] for a thorough review of its iteration over the years as it drew upon theory and research from the fields of Communication and Library and Information Science (LIS), disciplines whose literatures have traditionally overlapped very little.

Dr. Dervin became a strong advocate for user-centered research, and for pursuing interdisciplinary collaboration in Communication and LIS, particularly in the study of information seeking and use. Both disciplines have devoted substantial attention to the problem but with different perspectives. Communication with its emphasis on the design of messages to effectively transmit expert information, LIS with its emphasis on meeting user needs. In the domain of health information, Communication has focused on the role of information in public education campaigns, LIS on the potential use of information system resources. One is more focused on persuasion, the other on service [2].

I had integrated these disciplines in my own work at the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) – Communication by training, and LIS by vocation. In 2001, I was focused on research that would inform the system design and evaluation of the Library's new offerings in consumer health information, particularly the new MedlinePlus web portal and database. At the same time, I coordinated NLM's efforts to develop new outreach strategies that would engage prospective health information users, especially those in minority and underserved communities, to become aware of these new technological offerings, and to integrate them into their lives as they searched for and used health information for the betterment of themselves and their families.

I sought advice from Brenda to support me in efforts to inform and encourage interdisciplinary thinking by my NLM and collaborating health sciences library network colleagues, whose own training and experience was primarily in LIS. I also sought her wise counsel in designing new outreach initiatives appropriate for the domain of health information seeking. With both objectives in mind, I commissioned a white paper by Brenda that gave me much more than I had anticipated. It enhanced my own understanding of health information seeking and use as supported by empirical research utilizing elements of Communication and LIS and to see the possibilities of further integrating the two in support of NLM's outreach initiatives and information system design. For example, NLM launched the *Information Rx* campaign targeting physicians in which patients are given information prescriptions (analogous to a medication prescription) to access specific MedlinePlus content applicable to their own health condition(s), and to engage in mutual dialog to promote understanding [3]. The success of this protocol led to an expansion in which the MedlinePlus system was modified to connect directly to collaborating medical clinics and hospitals, with the information prescription made a part of the patient's electronic health record.

In my opinion the paper stands out as an equal in its comprehensiveness, thoroughness and nuanced insights, compared to other published literature reviews that have traced over the decades the evolution

of information seeking and use, theory, research, and practice. The paper is in the public domain as a work product paid for by the U.S. Government. It has been cited in the literature but remains largely undiscoverable and inaccessible some 20 years later as it resides in no repository or archive. Posthumous publication now in *Information Services and Use* remedies that omission [4]. It is made in tribute to Dr. Brenda Dervin who was respected by so many and who will be missed by no less. We have preserved the informality of Brenda's first-person writing.

My thanks to Nancy Roderer and Barbara Rapp who shared with me their personal perspectives from the vantage point of their long-time association with NLM. See [5] for a current day review of research on information seeking across disciplines.

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References

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