

REFLECTIONS

In recent times, “research” has become a loaded term, associated with a multitude of hot button topics. Though it is often marketed as the solution to all our problems, from ending world hunger to averting an influenza epidemic, I believe that there is one role of research that is frequently undervalued and ignored. In my experience, research is a great teacher of patience and persistence. Rarely does a research project go perfectly smoothly, without any hiccups or obstacles. Yet at publication, only the tip of the iceberg, or the end result is seen. The hours spent trouble-shooting and collecting data are a given, but rarely mentioned except for a brief acknowledgement in the methods section. And so it is as such, that research serves as a silent mentor. It is unyielding to the most dramatic of cries and unwavering in its impenetrability. Yet it is there, in the background, ever present and always available when you want to peruse its depths once more and try again. In this regard, it is like the best and worst of teachers – uncompromising, but otherwise forgiving of failure. Though the stack of books and articles will not reveal its secrets to you at your demand, regardless of how hard you plead, it will remain there for when you are ready to look.

In this sense, I became aware of several new library resources and more familiar with others during my research process. To my undisguised and probably inane amazement, I learned that the Osler library was not just a storage place for Osler’s personal library, but contained thousands of other books as well and, incredible as it may seem, functioned just like any other library. This was quite shocking, as I had been convinced that it was simply a relic, like a museum artefact, all throughout my undergraduate degree. Another new aspect of the library that I had discovered was the so called “Closed Stacks” of the Redpath Basement. Venturing to such a destination, with the aid of the ever-knowledgeable librarians was again a new experience during this research process. In this respect, though I was already familiar with conducting literature reviews using published journal articles, I became better acquainted with the journals that published on the topics of ethics and humanities, rather than the basic science journals that I was most accustomed to. I was also pleasantly surprised that the prominent journals, like the Lancet and the JAMA had digital copies of their earliest editions online, as it greatly aided the search for early material. All in all, I would say that this research experience could be characterized as a well-needed injection of humanities into a well-perfused body of basic science research, which had preoccupied me for so long.