When librarians are indispensable

NHS South Central libraries are more than book depositories. They can make all the difference with your studies and training. Former librarian Emma Godfrey reports

Whether you need a change of scenery, e-learning guidance or you have a crucial lecture to prepare, the 30 libraries of NHS South Central are where you should head.

They provide a learning environment for NHS educators and students alike. Every library from the Isle of Wight to Milton Keynes houses books, reports and journals to borrow and for reference. There are computers for individual access to the internet and e-resources, printing and copying facilities and quiet study space. There is inter-library borrowing, so even the rarest articles and titles can be accessed. And all of this, for the most part, is free to registered users and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

One regular library user, a clinical educator from Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust, says of her local Royal Hampshire County Hospital library:
Making the most of your library

The contact details of your local NHS library
There are 30 NHS libraries in NHS South Central and NHS South West. This amounts to more than 100 libraries, excluding the university hospital libraries in Oxford and Southampton. Visit www.swims.nhs.uk. To find your nearest library to pick up a card.

An NHS Athens account
With an Athens username and password, you can access electronic databases, e-journals, e-books and e-learning from computers anywhere. To register for an NHS Athens account, visit www.library.nhs.uk/athens.

NHS-funded libraries across NHS South Central are open to all NHS staff, trainees, trainers and learners

Whether you...
• Need research evidence for patient care or current management thinking
• Need to do an assignment for a course, do an e-learning programme, prepare a presentation
• Are doing an NVQ or an MSc, looking for a career move or returning to practice
• Want to use a computer away from your workplace, browse new books, look at the newspapers
• Just need space to think

Resources include
• Electronic textbooks – access the Oxford Handbooks, Oxford Textbooks, Key Topics and A-Z series titles and a wealth of mental health books from your desktop
• Electronic journals – hundreds of titles in medicine, nursing, psychology, management

Time-saving services include
• Setting up contents page alerts for your journals in your area of work
• Signposting you to the best short-cuts to information for your area of work
• Books and articles delivered to your workplace
• Quick but expert searches

Do you have any questions or comments on this article? We want to hear your views. Please email nesceducation@nesc.nhs.uk

Learning Resources

It would be difficult to do my job as efficiently without the librarians’ help and expertise

‘It is an important resource, which supports my role as a clinical educator with medical students.’

Whether you’re mentoring on a Master’s course, teaching medical students or using the library for personal learning, there is something for everyone’s needs. But the library is much more than the building and its contents. It is the team of librarians that makes the library the service it is. Sir J. A. Muir Gray, the Chief Knowledge Officer of the NHS, says: ‘The librarian is the most important resource in the library.’

Our clinical educator can vouch for this: ‘The staff at the Royal Hampshire and coare are passionate about promoting their roles as an advisory and knowledgeable resource for study and are always accessible and approachable.’

She says that users can receive free one-to-one tuition on all aspects of the internet, and that they can also ‘access articles that may only be available in the British Library or other off-site academic institutions and ensure their availability in a timely way.’

She adds: ‘With the huge time pressures on educators, it is very useful having librarians who are able to pinpoint a literature search with just a couple of key words or carry out the literature search themselves for you.’

NHS libraries are a multi-disciplinary information service that has to be relevant to educators, managers, clinical and support staff and students. Many have specialist librarians, for example, with expertise in women’s and children’s health. There is also a group of outreach librarians whose job it is to promote the service and provide training and workplace information support.

According to Linda Atkinson, Reader Service Manager at the Health Care Libraries of the University of Oxford, outreach librarians can make a big difference to educators. ‘We can save them time. Once they realise what we can do for them, such as going into their workplace to offer support, we are able to make sure they get the latest information,’ she says.

“They appreciate the personal contact. We discuss their particular query and tailor the information to their needs.”

NESCL has recently increased its funding to some of the more under-resourced library services in the region. This additional spending should increase staff capacity, including for these outreach roles, increasing awareness of what the libraries can offer and levels of library support for all NHS staff across the area.

The local health librarian will also play a significant role in the success of the new NHS Evidence Service, which will be launched in April. In Lord Darzi’s report published last year, entitled High Quality Care for All, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence was asked to establish a web-based service to help NHS staff to access clinical and non-clinical evidence and best practice. This will replace the current National Library for Health.

NESCL library and E-learning Resources Manager Helen Bingham says: ‘The information resources are expensive and out there. It’s library staff who make the difference when it comes to realising the value of our investment and getting evidence into practice.’

The librarians have an in-depth knowledge of healthcare, information technology skills and many of them have teaching qualifications. As part of their remit, they visit you in your place of work, organise the delivery of books and signpost short-cuts to information specific to you. But why should you go to the library, when you only have to reach for your computer? It is all down to personal preference, but the face-to-face contact of a librarian can make your literature searches easier and your lecture preparation run more smoothly.

In this era of constantly evolving technologies, it is good to know that there are experts who are able to guide us through.

Our clinical educator says: ‘Library staff are dedicated to supporting staff to fulfil their academic requirements. They are unfailingly helpful. It would be more difficult to do my job as efficiently without their help and expertise.’

Ms Bingham recommends making friends with your local librarian as a professional colleague who is familiar with accessing resources.

So what are you waiting for? As our educator puts it: ‘It’s there, it’s free, it’s an invaluable resource – use it!’

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A SWIMS library membership card
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