

Working for patients

The Government White Paper on the NHS will have a significant impact on Libraries. Michael Carmel writes:

The White Paper and the eight working papers which have followed it, despite the lack of detail, constitute the most radical in the recent series of NHS re-organizations, 1974-88. Each of the papers covers a major issue. A good summary of all eight was published in *Health Service Journal*, 2nd March 1989, p.254-257. The full impact of the papers on library services will take some time to evaluate. For the moment I would like to put forward the following thoughts.

- A planned approach to provision will be more difficult. The emphasis will shift from planning, regulation and control to contractual obligations and bargaining.
- District Library Services will still be needed but may be provided in varied ways
- a district may contract out the service to a hospital (opted out or not), or vice versa.
- GPs will have more budgetary accountability. In spite of "opting out" provisions they will actually be more closely integrated with RHAs, as their budget holders, than before. This may affect the way they organize their access to library services.

Accountability is the central theme (enforceable by contract rather than managerially or politically). This covers:

(a) **Financial accountability:** librarians will need to learn about budgeting. In future this will include capital depreciation as well as revenue (staff and non-staff). Most librarians have some elementary book-keeping skills. Top up training (eg on spreadsheet use) will help to keep them ahead of the game. Sensible headings for use in libraries will need to be developed. Income as well as expenditure lines will be required.

In the extreme form of full clinical budgeting, all library services will have to be costed and recharged to departments. This is unlikely to be widely implemented for some years.

(b) **Performance Indicators:** These are statistical measures of activity expressed as ratios and linked to potential requirements, resources, etc. The RLG's minimum data set is a start, and must be developed so that librarians can demonstrate the levels of service they are providing.

(c) **Audit:** Medical Audit is now a very high profile activity. It will be compulsory, it features as one whole working paper, and is likely to be embraced by the doctors as "an antidote to performance indicators". Librarians must also embrace it for the same reason. Professional audit and quality assurance must go to the top of the

agenda in order to avoid totally inappropriate measures of performance and management/political/accounting interventions.

(d) Audit (again): Handled properly by us medical audit is the greatest opportunity to put library services centre stage, because audit requires access to up to date and accurate clinical knowledge more than any other process. However we can lose this opportunity if we don't make our helping role absolutely clear.

(e) Accreditation: There is at present no real "hospitals inspectorate" in the UK, but opting out, the growth of the private sector, and other trends make it seem inevitable. Moves have begun to ensure some degree of professional (ie medical and nursing) control of the process. Librarians must co-operate with this to ensure libraries are "on the agenda". Attempts to input old-fashioned standards will fail and do nothing but harm, but some form of statement about the quality and performance levels required will be very valuable. There are both great risks and great opportunities in these changes. Librarians stand to gain a great deal if they adopt a high profile and move quickly to become key information providers. They stand to lose equally if they run away from the problems.

People

Congratulations to **Claire Mitchell** on the birth of her baby daughter **Bethan** on 13 May. Claire, who served on the NIS Committee is now living in Cheshire.

Elizabeth Hoey has been appointed Librarian at Romford College of Nursing and Midwifery.

John Loy has been appointed Assistant Information Officer at MIDIRS.

Forthcoming events of interest

7-9 July	Norwich. Under New Management: The Challenge of the 1990s. MHWLG Annual Conference. University of East Anglia, Norwich. Contact: Janice Henney, 11 Seckford St, Woodbridge, Suffolk. Tel: 03943-2839 (eves). Bookings: Chris Thompson, James Paget Library, James Paget Hospital, Lowestoft Road, Gorleston, NR31 6LA. Tel: 0493-600611.
29 Sept	York. Taking the initiative. MHWLG Conference for working in the Welfare Sector. University of York.
31 Oct	London. Time management study day. Following the success of the first NIS study day on time management, a second day has been organised in conjunction with the Industrial Society and will be held at the Library Association, London. Cost £40.00. Contact Judith Fairweather for further details.