Currency, content and access: the changing role of nursing indexing services

Jill Beard Deputy University Librarian, Bournemouth University and Jackie Lord Head of Library and Information Services, Royal College of Nursing

Introduction

The themes of currency, content, access, and change in relation to nursing indexing services and particular *British Nursing Index* will be explored in this paper. Access is defined as access through partnerships and collaborations in addition to methods of delivery. The nursing background that led to the need to develop new means of delivering index services is outlined, followed by the partnership that was formed to create a new approach to index production. The paper will then concentrate on the new product, new means of access, different types of collaboration leading to increased access, and finally changes which are taking place to ensure that we meet the needs of users. The need for current, up to date information has been the overriding principle throughout.

Background

During the late 1980s and 1990s far reaching changes were taking place in nursing education. The profession became much more academically rooted. Nurse education was transferred to Universities, and Project 2000 was introduced UK-wide, which meant that nursing students were now granted supernumerary status. In 1994 the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting completed its framework for post-registration education and practice (Prep.) Prep's two principles were compulsory-re-registration for all practising nurses and graduate-level or equivalent entry to specialist practice. These initiatives to increase the professionalisation of nursing led to an increased demand for research-based, current information and placed extra pressure on Libraries and indexing services. Evidence based health care and evidence

based nursing practice also increased the need for current, comprehensive, quality indexes to the nursing literature. Wide ranging changes in health care took place in the UK during the 1990s, from the 1999 **NHS and Community Care Act** to the subsequent government's white paper **The New NHS** in 1997. This period of rapid change has also led to a need for indexes to UK nursing material which are indexed by information specialists with an understanding of the UK health care scene. At the same time the amount of information being published in the nursing field continued to grow, which led to difficulties in maintaining currency in the indexes being produced. Patients were also becoming much better informed themselves, and were asking nurses why particular treatments were being used, and questioning diagnoses. Nurses needed to be able to demonstrate to patients that the choice of treatment was based on the best quality information available.

Partnership

It was no longer feasible for one institution to adequately provide a current index for over 220 journals relevant to nursing. In 1996 the Royal College of Nursing, which had produced the *Nursing Bibliography*, formed a partnership with Bournemouth University, Poole and Salisbury NHS Trusts, which had produced the *Nursing Midwifery Index*. These organisations were striving to proactively deal with their changing environment. Both products were available in print and electronic formats. The two indexes were amalgamated to form *British Nursing Index*. This was a unique partnership comprising a national professional association, a university and two NHS Trusts. The joint expertise and knowledge of the user base provided by the librarians from these institutions placed them in a very good position to produce a quality bibliographic database of references to articles in health care journals indexed from a UK perspective. Librarians from the trust libraries had a good knowledge of practitioners, the university librarians of the student population and the professional association of a wide range of potential users UK-wide, which made it easier to promote the value of the product. The partnership enabled the participating libraries to share workload and therefore speed up production. The partnership is developed on a team based approach.

8

with an Executive team, Editorial team, Indexing team and Administrative team. Teams communicate via email, telephone, fax and meetings.

Product

British Nursing Index (BNI) (http://www.bni.org.uk/) is an index to references to articles from over 220 journals from the Libraries of Royal College of Nursing, Bournemouth University and Poole and Salisbury NHS Trusts. This ensures relevance to UK nursing practice. All journals indexed are available in the UK. The majority of the journals are from the UK, but the index also covers journals from the USA, Australia, New Zealand and other countries. Only English language journals are indexed. The index has always been user-focussed, both in terms of the nursing community and the information professionals purchasing the product. Efficient access to the information is assured through the use of Subject Headings, and an annotated title. Full abstracts are not included, as it was felt that this would lead to a less current product. Currency has always been the guiding principle. The quality of the content is assured because of the excellent holdings of the participating libraries. The product has been available since 1996 on CD-ROM, via the Internet and print. However the software used initially was non-standard. The product was successful from the start regarding currency, content and access, but by 1997 it was not possible to develop the product further within the partnership.

Access

The desire to ensure users could access quality assured comprehensive content without any loss of currency has led to developing access strategies that exploited the latest technologies. Although the roots of the product were in a card index the first development quest was for simple desktop publishing from a database. The only limitations to this valued, reliable and highly successful format are the lack of an author index and the sheer size of the annual bound volumes. From as early as 1994 *Nursing Midwifery Index (NMI)* was pioneering Internet access and before the launch of the joint product both *NMI* and *Nursing Bibliography* had their CD-ROM versions. Therefore at launch the product had three highly

successful access platforms but to develop the usability of the electronic versions it was decided to make use of proprietary software from the major health information providers. The software would need to enable cross database searching so the currency of the information on UK specialisms could be put alongside the international products like *Cinahl* or *Medline*. Silver Platter offered the product this solution. Three additional requirements were for customised searching at novice and expert levels, linking to the full-text of the articles and the ability to enable remote access to the information through suitable authentication controls. Both Silver platter (http://www.optology.com/) and Ovid offered potential in all these areas. Over the two and a half years of the first publishing partnership all of the strands have developed. 2000 should see the reality of a user logging onto the Internet at home through a *BNI* subscription paid for by their work place and being able to access the full-text of the very latest literature within six weeks of its publication. Alternatively the individual following a continuing professional development programme without such institutional support can expect to be able to access the database through their affiliation to the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) or one of the partner institutions and only pay for any full-text downloads they might require. With the partner publishers providing the technical framework the British Nursing Index (BNI) partnership is set to develop the product's accessibility further with the introduction of a new thesaurus developed from the subject headings. The next initiatives to develop access will focus on quality filters, *quick search* profiles, increased support for evidence based nursing and a return to the debate over whether to include abstracts as well as the full text links. The decision on whether to abstract or not is still driven by the determination not to compromise currency or relevance. Whatever the future holds for access strategies for the present there is full commitment to maintaining print, CD-ROM and Internet access.

Collaboration

Much has been said about the use of partnerships. Without collaborative ventures it would not have been possible to produce a *British Nursing Index* with relevance to the profession and which uses all the access

options available. The publishing partnership has worked to exploit the principles of informatics, use the latest C & IT and to position the product in such a way as to be able to benefit from the latest developments in electronic publishing. For this to lead to better products there has to be a commitment to taking user feedback. The evidence from the user collaboration shows that the most significant gap is the lack of abstracts. It is not clear yet how much the users rather than the information professionals who broker that use feel this lack. With the advent of full text opportunities the partnership is committed to a further scoping of whether to add abstracts. The full text opportunities bring another strand into the range of collaborations. Much has been spoken and written about the challenges of working with publishers to ensure full text access. Using the collective power of publishing partners the producers can concentrate on the product rather than these direct negotiations. However, the knowledge of the literature and the users has helped to direct where e-journal negotiations would be most beneficial. Another aspect of collaboration is evidenced by the discussions between *Cinahl* and *BNI* over mutually beneficial developments. Users may think this unlikely when the products could be portrayed as competitors but the BNI partnership view the two indexes as complementing each other and the two together provide more comprehensive coverage of the nursing literature. Perhaps therefore one day a joint research project might be possible looking at an aspect of cross database searching or thesaurus compatibility. A final strand of collaboration, which is dramatically changing the access strategies of subscribers to nursing indexes, is that of consortia purchasing deals. Producers and their publishers have to work closely to arrive at packages that increase access without compromising revenues needed for new product developments. Here again BNI has advantages as the partners are both recipients of the benefits of such publishing deals as well as a producer of a product that is in great demand. Before such deals were commonplace BNI were encouraging their Partner Publisher to develop flexible pricing strategies for the largest consortia and at the other end of the scale for the individual who might only require access for 3 months. The former has been achieved, the latter still has some difficulties, but e-

commerce and further publishing/marketing partnerships may finally enable a form of pay as you go geared to the individual.

Changing Role

The strands of product currency and content have blended with access developments in each evolution of nursing indexing services. The content of the card index was immediately available to those who came into the library and searched the catalogue. The print index enabled quality controlled access month by month to users in libraries world-wide with the currency of articles indexed from only 6 weeks after publication. However the search was restricted to an individual subject heading. The CD-ROM provided more searchability with subject, author and free text searching but some of the currency was lost. The Internet reintroduced the possibility of currency but without systematic quality controls as the data was entered into the system. The necessity to use third party proprietary software prohibited this option but quality assured data is available, at a premium subscription rate, every four weeks. So once again the Nursing Index has the currency of the printed index. The product is no longer just an index to the collections of the partner libraries. By the use of the editorial team the subject indexing has remained focused on the needs of clinical effectiveness of the pre registration student, nurse practitioner and researcher, CPD, and most recently the patients. Thesaurus developments and quality filters mean that nursing indexes can now be delivered in sub sets that make the literature accessible to specialist branches or more innovatively to patients and their families. This could be the next changing role for BNI. The accessibility has moved from within the four walls of the library to being possible to access from any Internet connection in the world. Currently prior arrangements to pay for the access to the index are required through the marketing agents, for example Optology. In time the producers would like to see the alternative of pay-as-you-go. In 2000 pay-as-you-go will be restricted to choosing to download full-text of articles and paying the publishers directly, but why not use e-commerce to enable pay as you go access to the database itself. It is assumed that this model might be attractive to non-UK users of

the British literature. Allowing them to select whenever their topic warrants a search of the British sources but not subscribe at a rate higher than usage can justify. Whatever the changing role of nursing indexes might be the views of the users will help shape the business and operational plans of the producers. Those views will include feedback from our fellow information professionals and our client groups both in the UK and world-wide. Changing roles is equally a phrase that applies to the librarians who produce the index. Professional skills of the indexer underpin and form the rock upon which to build the new skills of editor, of market researcher and sales person, and business manager. All in an environment of exploiting ICT. Being involved in a successful business venture brings benefits to the individuals and their organisations, including managing a changing environment.

Conclusion

The evolution of nursing indexing services is mirrored in the evolution of the hybrid library. The evolution is far from over and the changing role will continue. The vision of Internet access in 1994 has taken six years to become an everyday reality. The pace of change has accelerated but who can predict what the next technologies will enable. What will remain constant is the need to retain commitment to currency, content and accessibility using all media. Print indexes still do have a role despite the Internet revolution. Finally by developing partnerships and listening to the users nursing indexes will continue to evolve.

Bibliography

Crane, S., Urquhart, C. (1994) Preparing for Prep: the impact of changes in continuing education for nurses on library provision of journals and current awareness services: a case study. *Health Libraries Review*, 11(1), pp.29-38.

Smith, E., Young, T. (1998) Methods of obtaining good quality research evidence. *Community Nurse*, 4(10), pp.48-50.