

The Impact of Professional Development Requirements on the use of Information Sources by Nurses : An Exploratory Survey

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A Summary of the report and its recommendations

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Our basic question was whether the College library in Plymouth had a role in providing a service to support the proposed PREP continuing education requirements for nurses, midwives and health visitors. If the answer was in the affirmative, we wished to have some idea of the role, and the types of library and information services to be offered. If the answer was negative, we wished to propose some possible courses of action.

Time factors limited the exploration of the possible roles, but four main areas were chosen to study in detail.

There were: 1) the methods used by trained staff to obtain access to journals;
2) the preferred means by which staff kept up to date (study day, distance learning, library browsing etc.);
3) perceptions of various formal and informal information sources; and
4) information seeking skills

A simple stratified sample (acute and community staff) comprising around 5% of the total nursing staff in the Plymouth area was studied. The survey was divided into two parts, the first being a structured interview. A questionnaire was completed at an interview with the participant. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on professional development plans and preferences, use make of ward/unit resources, particularly journals, and optimum periods for library opening. The second part, also completed at the interview, was a vignette or case study information problem. The responses (written by the participant) provided indications of information seeking skills and perceptions of various information sources, both formal and informal.

Results indicated that most staff were exceeding the PREP minimum of five days over three years. Most staff preferred a study day for updating their knowledge. The most popular combination of leaning styles was a study day backed up by further reading. Accreditation of learning was a matter of concern among all staff. Our conclusion was that the library could promote itself far more at study day events.

Reading of journals by trained staff appeared to be selective, most staff reading the articles of interest to them personally and omitting non-relevant material. Few units were considering new subscriptions, and the majority looked to the College library to provide a comprehensive collection of journals, particularly in clinical nursing. This has obvious implications for funding requirements, given the number of new titles and the escalating price of periodicals.

The vignette (case study) data indicated that around one third of the participants could be termed confident in their information seeking strategies. Around one third appeared to lack any skills. A competent information seeking strategy was associated with the group which would have used more than two sources of information. the competent group were also more likely to mention use of a library than the group which used two or fewer sources of information, a result that cheered us. What was also clear was that many of the staff had some idea of what they should be doing, even though they lacked expertise. The market for information skills education in some shape or form is there.

Our case studies were also designed to gain some idea of their perceptions of the various healthcare libraries in Plymouth. The findings clearly show that no single library in Plymouth would be adequate to serve the needs of nursing staff if current trends in health and welfare requirements continue. The survey highlighted the importance of health education information, and the continuing reliance placed on public library services by nursing staff. It is unfortunate that politics and vested interests often seem to combine against the establishment of an information network that would benefit the user - and the taxpayer.

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