

EXETER CONFERENCE - TO BURY OR TO APPRAISE: SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITIES

Anne Rowlands

As a new member of Libraries for Nursing, the Health Libraries Group Conference was an adventure. Not only did Exeter seem a long way away but the title of the conference was also a challenge. As a librarian in the higher education field it was also a good way of getting to know my colleagues in the NHS. The weekend was busy and fulfilling.

Evidence based health care not only covers the traditional but also complementary medicines. Professor Edzard Ernst in his opening address commented on the fact that complementary medicines are used by 25-50% of the population and although it is commonly held that they are natural, safe, and effective there is little evidence to back this up. There is therefore a requirement to carry out further trials and systematic reviews to provide evidence of their effectiveness - in short, complementary medicine is under researched meaning that the evidence is incomplete, considering that a large percentage of the population use this form of medication the question we have to ask is - Why so little evidence?

On Saturday morning the first paper was given by Angela Coulter from the *King's Fund*. Her paper was based on the fact that patients want to know more about their condition, the risks, the benefits and the treatment. The patient is also wanting to take a fuller role in the decision about their treatment. This leads on to the question of the quality and availability of the information for the patient. The increase in patient involvement is more prevalent in the younger generation and it is thought that the information given to the patient does not increase anxiety. In the paper the speaker pointed out that it is not feasible to provide the patient with all relevant information. One way of providing the material is with interactive videos but providing any type of information could become time-consuming and expensive. Maybe the time will come when patients demand too much for their own good.

A double act followed, two exceptionally good speakers, Doctors Sweeney and Taylor, who presented a paper called "Barriers to implementing EBM in primary care". The speakers highlighted the necessity for GPs to access the information so as to be able to practice EBM. One problem that they encounter is the time between a home visit and returning to the surgery. It was suggested to us as librarians that we could support GPs and inform them of where to find the evidence. The speakers mentioned some publications where you could find the evidence. Examples of these were *Evidence Based Medicine*, *Bandolier*, *Annals of Internal Medicine* and of course, *Cochrane Library*. The speakers went on to address the problems of access and the resistance to change.

Seminar papers moved to workshops. The ever increasing need to identify as many possibly relevant studies in a given research topic is in some cases becoming part of a health librarian's job. This particular workshop examined

the role of the information professional in providing a comprehensive search which will include grey and unpublished literature. It also covered devising

strategies to enable the professional to identify and locate this material. The workshop also covered how to present search strategies clearly to the researcher so that the review will provide the researcher with the maximum available literature. This leads on to providing the final report of the systematic review.

The afternoon was divided into 3 groups specialising in various areas of health librarianship. The papers that related to my particular interests were those relating to provision of services for nurses. The first short paper was given by Sally Hernando in promoting evidence based practice to nurses. The introduction of PREP has encouraged nursing to become a more research based profession. The question Sally posed was whether nurses are taking it seriously and also how much support librarians are willing to give to make nursing more evidence based. Whilst studying for her MBA, Sally undertook a community profile to determine the proportion of qualified staff accessing library services in South Buckinghamshire. The results were surprising. Problems were caused by the integration of Bucks College of Nursing and Midwifery with a higher education establishment which has imposed further restrictions on access to qualified staff not undertaking a university course. How to overcome this problem is now in the hands of the local Trusts.

The second of the three short papers was entitled "The role of information in achieving clinical effectiveness". Gabby Fennessey discussed the testing of the practitioner as to whether they are achieving clinical effectiveness - this is done through clinical audit. The problem arises with nurses and professions allied to medicine gaining access to the evidence. Again the move to integration into Higher Education has posed problems with access for this particular client group unless they are enrolled on a course delivered by the University.

This led on to the final short paper, by Margaret Ashcroft, about physiotherapists and the impact library and information services. Many physiotherapists have important decision making jobs and need access to the evidence. This though, is made difficult as access to services is limited. A survey was done and the results highlight the problem again of the integration into higher education.

On Sunday morning the first paper was given by J. Muir Gray, Director of Research & Development in Oxford and Anglia. I waited in anticipation as I had heard so much about him. The paper was delivered with energy and enthusiasm. In this speech the changes that are taking place in the information world were discussed and it was emphasised that these changes have come at a time when evidence based health care is increasing. Muir Gray defined evidence based health care as "decision making based on a careful appraisal of the best evidence available". He went on to clarify this by adding that decisions are not made purely on the evidence but also on the needs and values of the population served and the resources available. The paper went on to describe the stages in the development of EBHC - the production of evidence

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- ensuring the evidence is available
- implementing evidence, either with individual patients or with population.

If EBHC is to be used to its maximum then all three stages need to be fulfilled. It is the librarian's job to ensure that the evidence is available.

After this inspiring paper there followed some short talks on National Initiatives in evidence based health care. These included a talk by Carol Lefebvre about the UK Cochrane Centre and Julie Glanville about the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination. The latter plays an important role in EBHC as it allows for easy access to the results of research and effective summaries to allow EBHC to be successful.

It came as a great surprise that in the USA there is an education establishment that trains medical students using totally the problem-based, self directed, small group learning. The McMaster University uses the tutorial group as the central focus of the students' learning process. The problem-based learning allows the student to develop their information seeking skills. With the students' basic skills revolving around "critical thinking" they also need to develop skills to be life long learners and a strong force behind evidence based practice. The challenge to librarians is the self directed and small group learning.

An excellent and fluid talk given by Maggie Haines rounded the whole weekend off. In her address she talked about the role of the librarian and evidence based health care and how in her appointment she has tried to raise the profile of the health librarian so as to successfully implement and encourage all health professionals to practice EBM.

The conference was a great success and has given me a lot to think about - the changing role of the librarian and how to cope with the demands of EBM with minimal spending.

Anne Rowlands is Health Studies Librarian at the University of Luton. Anne's attendance at the Conference was sponsored by Libraries for Nursing.

MORE INTERNET INFO

- British Computer Society - Nursing Specialist Group (NSG)
see: <http://www.man.ac.uk/bcsnsg/>
- International Medical Informatics Association
<http://amia2.amia.org>. Has a nursing section.
- Rod Ward & Pete Dean are interested in collaborative development of internet resources for nurses. Contact them for more information:

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