

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES HSG(97)47

Executive Summary

Libraries are a key resource for clinical effectiveness, for research and for education and training, all of which are crucial to the delivery of high quality health care. The lack of recent national guidance on library and information services and the complex funding arrangements for library services has led to the fragmentation of information provision within the NHS and not all NHS staff have access to the health knowledge base. This Guideline sets out key principles and actions for improving access to information via the development of multi-professional library and information services.

1. Action

1.1 NHS Trusts and Health Authorities

All NHS Trusts and Health Authorities should draw up a library and information strategy covering all staff groups.(1) This strategy should demonstrate how they plan to achieve access to library and information services for all their staff, by directly provided services, contracts or service level agreements, and the funding flows which support this. Such strategies should be in place by Autumn 1998 and should include arrangements to monitor progress.

1NHS Staff includes all hospital, primary care and community health staff, relevant trainees, general medical and dental practitioners and their staff. An increasing amount of information is disseminated via electronic networks. Library and information services should be included in NHS Trust/Health Authority information management and technology strategies.

1.2 Regional Education and Development Groups (REDGs)/Education Consortia

Education contracts and strategic plans for multi-professional education, training and workforce planning should include access to library support. Consortia should encourage partnerships between NHS libraries and higher education providers and look flexible and innovatively at the scope for using funds to deliver improved library and information services.

1.3 Deans of Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

The postgraduate medical and dental Deans have an important role to play in ensuring that Medical and Dental Education Levy (MADEL) contracts support the development of planned, high quality multi-professional library services and in monitoring the quality of services to doctors in training grades and for continuing medical education.

1.4 Regional Offices

Regional Offices will need to ensure that regionwide development of library and information services is in line with national strategies for information management and communication and that NHS Trust and Health Authorities develop action plans for effective library and information services for all staff groups. In addition, Regional Directors of Research and Development will

need to be satisfied that NHS Trusts and other providers receiving support funding from the R&D levy have access to the library services and resources needed to support the R&D work.

2. Background

2.1 *The Role of Library and Information Services in the NHS*

Access to the health knowledge base is essential to the delivery of high quality health care. Decision-making by staff and patients and carers needs to be evidence-based and health professionals need to be able to continue to develop and update their own skills. High quality libraries, and skilled library staff, are central to knowledge base access as they:

- provide information to enable NHS staff to carry out their work;
- support the education, training and professional development of all NHS staff;
- support postgraduate and continuing medical and dental education;
- support high quality evidence-based clinical practice and management decision making;
- support research and development undertaken by NHS staff and the dissemination of research findings;
- assist quality assurance and medical audit;
- provide health promotion and other information for patients.

Many NHS libraries function as multi-disciplinary units able to offer a wide range of services including enquiry services, online searching, journal and book loans, current awareness services, information retrieval and critical appraisal skills training. NHS library staff are familiar with a wide range of printed and electronic materials, have skills in information retrieval and management, and are experienced in training others to search for literature.

2.2 *Issues to be tackled*

The concept of a knowledge based service has resulted in increased demand for library and information services and a greater need for such services to be planned and co-ordinated across sectoral boundaries. However, the effective development of libraries has been hampered by several factors. These include:

- The lack of a national policy for library and information services or clear national links to R&D, Education and Training, or IM&T strategies.
- Complex funding. Trust libraries receive funding from multiple sources and funding streams for libraries can be difficult to identify.
- Uncertainty about capital funding for developing library and information services.
- A legacy of libraries established to serve separate professional groups.
- Uncertainty about the range of staff groups which library services are funded to support, which can lead to inadequate services for nursing and other non-medical professional staff and community-based staff.
- The transfer of nursing and midwifery education into Higher Education and the consequent closure or absorption of College of Health Libraries.

3. Key principles

3.1 Access

NHS libraries should be multi-disciplinary and meet the needs of all staff groups. NHS Trusts and Health Authorities have a responsibility as good employers, and as providers and commissioners of high quality evidence based care, to ensure that all staff have access to the information needed to carry out their work effectively. Access policies should consider the information needs of contractors, those undertaking career breaks and others.

3.2 Resources

Resources required to support an effective library service will vary according to local needs but will include a mix of professional and clerical library staff, an appropriate range of books and journals, electronic information resources, computers and networks.

3.3 Funding

There is a need for better co-ordination of funding streams for library services and clarity about the purposes and staff groups for which different funding streams are provided. Access to library services should be free at the point of use although charges may be levied for certain services, for example photocopying, where the library incurs a cost. Such charges should be levied on a common basis from all users. Current funding arrangements are summarised in Annex 1.

3.4 Region-wide co-ordination

There should be regionwide co-ordination of library services based on the key national principles of equity of access for all groups of staff, a multi-disciplinary approach to library provision and transparency in library funding. Regional Library Advisers will have a key role to play in this and in supporting NHS Trusts and HAs in developing local strategies encouraging co-operation and value for money services via partnerships, contracts and service level agreements.

4. Relevant Guidance

4.1 Further good practice guidance on library services will be drawn up and disseminated.

4.2 The role of library services in supporting education and training, research and development and other strategies is referred to in a range of Executive Letters and other publications:

- Education and Training Planning Guidance EL(97)39, Department of Health, 1997
- Promoting Clinical Effectiveness, Department of Health, 1996
- Planning and Priorities Guidance EL(97)19, Department of Health, 1997
- R&D Support Funding for NHS Providers from 1998/99: invitation to bid, Department of Health, 1997