

LIBRARIES for NURSING - Winter Study Day 1993

Nursing and multidisciplinary libraries: the parting of the ways?

Date: Monday 6th December 1993

Venue: Royal College of Nursing

This section includes two of the papers from the study day plus a report of the opening address. Further contributions, it is hoped, will appear in future issues of the "Bulletin".

Multidisciplinary Libraries and Developments in Postgraduate Medical Education

A Paper by Professor Richard West, Medical Postgraduate Dean, South West Region

Reported by Sally Hammond

Nursing Librarian

Buckinghamshire College of Nursing and Midwifery

Professor West began his paper with an acute observation on the traditional state of cooperation between doctors and nurses. He had once given a lecture on the need for doctors and nurses to have the same code of ethics. This was followed by a nurse claiming that part of *her* ethical duty was to *protect* patients from their doctors!

When postgraduate deans were first appointed, they were not able to exercise any real power. This situation has now changed: Professor West's budget 2.5 years ago was £10,000; it is now many times larger. Further change is imminent with the development of new NHS Regions: it is not certain what the implications for postgraduate medical education are.

Many changes have also taken place in nursing education. The traditional school of nursing run by a matron is long gone, and the new multidisciplinary colleges of health are to be welcomed. However, these developments have often failed to take account of the needs of trained nurses, whose only access to library facilities is often the medical library. It has to be recognised that medical libraries are funded solely for doctors in training, and there is no obligation to provide a service for nurses.

Professor West stated that high quality health care depends on high quality library and information services: high quality education cannot be provided without these. The circular HM (67) 33 on Postgraduate Medical and Allied Education refers to the desirability of library services for qualified nurses, but in most cases this has simply gathered dust.

There are seven main challenges in the provision of health care library and information services:

1. The large growth in the number of biomedical journals, making selection more difficult and coverage more costly
2. New information technology
3. The need for library users to have more professional help, due to the increasing complexity of library resources

4. Rising prices and falling resources
5. The increasing professionalism of nurses and PAMs
6. The situation of some Colleges of Health away from the hospital campus
7. Changes in the management of postgraduate medical education

In order to determine what needs to be done to meet these challenges, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing multidisciplinary libraries were assessed, as follows:

Strengths

- Avoid reduplication of provision
- Economies of scale
- Better staffing levels
- Better use of resources

Weaknesses

- Overcrowding
- Competition for facilities

Opportunities

- Reorganisation of postgraduate medical education
- Relocation of Colleges of Health

Threats

- Tribalism
- Inadequate space / resources

Multidisciplinary libraries need to consider where they would like to be in 5 years' time. Sir Duncan Nichol was quoted as saying: "If purchasing is the engine for improving NHS performance, information must be the fuel that drives the engine". However, the role of libraries in this information provision has been ignored: it is unmentioned in most recent government publications on the health services.

Health care libraries are undervalued, underfunded and are not given sufficient priority. In order to bring about change librarians need to:

- Raise their profile
- Motivate
- Cooperate
- Develop a shared vision of the future
- Set targets
- Set standards
- Use levers for change

Professor West ended by reflecting on the fact that all librarians he had met seemed to be nice people. He felt that as a profession we need to look at our "nice" image and make efforts to ensure that we are not soft targets.

DISCUSSION

A lively discussion followed. It was pointed out that libraries should approach NHS Trusts for more funding. Professor West agreed and suggested that the end of the financial year was a good time to put in a bid for extra cash.

One member of the audience felt that library and management information were unconnected in the minds of NHS managers, which contributed to our low status.

It was suggested that librarians should mobilise their clients to protest about the poor funding of services. Professor West agreed with the proviso that all available facts should be gathered before doing this: having the facts on our side would weight the argument.