ACCESS TO THE KNOWLEDGE BASE IN SCOTLAND: WHERE ARE WE NOW

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In October 1996, a group was set up by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) to review the provision of library and information services to the NHS in Scotland. The Group was chaired by Dr Graham Buckley, Director of the Scottish Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education. Concern had been expressed by SLIC's Management Committee, that although organisations such as Scottish Health Information Network (SHINE) were actively involved in representing the interests of health sciences librarians, and undertook resource sharing through initiatives such as SHINE's union list, there was no overall strategic direction for Library Services in the NHS in Scotland.

The principles underpinning the review were
- Clinical effectiveness – access to the knowledge base plays a vital role in the provision of high quality healthcare
- Equality of access which enables staff to deliver high quality healthcare
- Sharing of resources – it was recognised that sharing of resources between higher education institutions, professional bodies and the NHS in Scotland would yield clinical and financial benefits.

The Review Group's Report "Enabling Access to the Knowledge Base of Healthcare" was published in May 1998, at a time of political change in the NHS in Scotland. This change included the publication of the White Paper "Designed to Care" in December 1997, as well as a new Information Management and Technology Strategic Programme in December 1998. These documents recognised the need for access to the knowledge base of healthcare, and as such dovetailed with the key themes and recommendations of the SLIC paper.

The Review Group recognised that there was no overall strategic control of Library Services in the NHS in Scotland; sources of funding were complex and uncertain; electronic access was poor; the skills base for making use of electronic access was poor and that there was no clear career and organisation framework for library and information staff in the NHS in Scotland.

The Report recognised six key areas for action;

1. Appointment of a National Co-ordinator to oversee development of services;

2. Formulation and promotion of an information strategy by NHS Trusts within the context of a national strategy;

3. Access to robust electronic networks for all NHS staff;

4. Resource sharing agreements between the NHS, the Higher Education Sector and professional organisations;

5. Co-operation between Information Management and Technology and Library and Information Services personnel in the National Health Service in Scotland to ensure that access to the knowledge base receives the same degree of consideration as management and patient information services;

6. Negotiate access to databases for NHS staff across Scotland.

Currently a small working group consisting of stakeholders from the Scottish Office, Scottish Health Information Network and various other bodies is looking at ways of developing a policy framework for library and information services in Scotland. The advent of the Scottish Parliament will have an impact on this process, and it is hoped that as SHINE celebrates its 25th Anniversary, the first steps will be taken towards planning and implementing an integrated approach to health care information in Scotland.

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Sources

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