

## All change: meeting the information needs of pharmacists

**Sarah Butler**

**Information Librarian**

**Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain**  
[sarah.butler@rpsgb.org](mailto:sarah.butler@rpsgb.org)

The view of a pharmacist in a white coat dispensing medicines from behind a counter is now outdated with pharmacists now taking on many new roles.

The new community pharmacy contract for England and Wales opens the door to a wide range of new services available to meet the real needs of patients.

Pharmacists are experts in medicines and their use and have the skills to help people choose healthier lifestyles, stay well and get the best out of any treatment that they need. New roles for pharmacists include: setting up clinics to diagnose, advise on and educate about health-related issues; supplementary and independent prescribing; providing access to a wider range of medicines as more are reclassified from prescription-only medicine to pharmacy medicine status; and working alongside GPs as advisors in the management of medicines.

Pharmacists registered as practising are now obliged to undertake continuing professional development (CPD). CPD requires pharmacists to proactively identify gaps in their knowledge and take steps to fill these gaps.

All of this will have an impact upon the services that the RPSGB's Library provides. The library expects an increase in the number of requests for material as pharmacists look to the library for this information.

So, how is the Library meeting this challenge? First and most obviously, as and when any new subject is studied by library members we are purchasing material in the new areas. In this instance, the Library is actively obtaining information in the areas of counselling, prescribing, patient-care, and so on. All are acquired with the purpose of helping pharmacists master their new functions. In order to support different learning styles (and different time pressures) material is acquired in more varied formats, for example, DVD and CD-ROM. This multimedia collection is made available for loan.

We expect an increase in the number of requests for material, whether books or journal articles, as a result of the requirements of CPD. Currently the Library does not attempt to perform the function of an undergraduate library and this is reflected in the number of copies of texts held. However, we await with interest whether increased pressure is placed on core texts, and whether we will need to review

our policy on copy numbers. Similarly expected increases in the use of the document supply service, currently supported in printed format, may require us to review our methods of document acquisition and to consider alternatives such as electronic document delivery.

This brings us to the subject of electronic information and the many challenges therein. Traditionally the RPSGB Library has provided a paper-based information service. For a number of years it has provided access to bibliographic databases on CD-ROM, but the core of its successful service has been based on the provision of information in print. It has acquired books and journals, all in print. It has developed a postal loan service, a document supply service and a literature search service. All of these services are still used and valued by members. However, with so much information now available online, user expectations with regard to electronic resources have been raised, and it is a task for the specialist library to meet those expectations.

Like every library, the RPSGB Library wishes to fulfil the expectations of its users. Our strengths lay in the specialist nature of the collection we hold. We focus on journal titles, databases and texts core to the subject of pharmacy. In a local setting the Library has successfully ventured into the realm of the electronic format. We provide on-site access to 70 electronic journal titles, to several pharmacy journal bibliographic databases, such as RPS e-PIC, and to the fulltext of the key drug reference texts, such as Martindale and Stockley via MedicinesComplete. Our collection is promoted to the membership

and the world through our online catalogue, OLIB Webview. Our web presence, currently under review with plans for expansion, allows the Library to promote its services further.

However, our specialist nature also provides us with our greatest challenge. As an independent health library we are associated with neither an NHS nor academic partner. For this reason we do not have access to the now established collection of the National Library for Health (NLH) or the advantageous licence negotiations of the JISC. Similarly we do not have the sizeable resources of the commercial pharmaceutical companies, being a not-for-profit membership organisation. While the number of pharmacists using the Library service is manageable, the potential number of users is huge. Every registered pharmacist is entitled to use the service; there are currently approximately 25,000 community pharmacists and 7,500 hospital pharmacists, plus 14,000 pharmacists in other sectors. In addition there are further groups (pharmacy technicians, pre-registration students and students studying the MPharm degree) to whom the Library's services are available. Many of these potential users already have access to electronic resources, for example to the NHS's Core Collection or to a university library service. However, there remains a sizeable number of potential users for whom the RPSGB Library remains their primary source of information, and for this reason we need as a Library to address the issue of equality of access to information. The Library is in the process of reviewing access to electronic resources for its members, and we predict that there are interesting times ahead.

While the Library is keen to utilise technological developments as we consider these to be fundamental in supporting the changing role of the pharmacist and the increasingly IT-aware library user, we do have to bear in mind a number of issues as we travel down this road. The first is that, while use of the Internet is increasing each year, it cannot yet be assumed that every pharmacist has equal access to this technology. For years pharmacists have been using technology to administer their businesses and to provide services, however this does not mean that all are wired to the 'information superhighway'. For this reason the provision of information in print format continues to be hugely important to the Library and its membership. We see a long future for postal loans and paper document supply.

Another issue is our function as a library. The Library supports the membership through the provision of information. However an equally important role is its preservation of information and literature about pharmacy for future generations. Again, this reinforces the need for a printed collection.

So, we have established the importance of our print collections and the services we provide based upon them. We have acknowledged the increasing importance of providing access to electronic resources to an expectant membership and others. However there are further ways in which we see the Library developing to meet the needs of pharmacists in their extended role.

The first is for the Library to take on a more active role in training and guidance. Many pharmacists now have access to the NLH Core Collection. However, those serving the community may not have convenient access to those who are best able to help them use the tools in the Core Collection, that is, the librarians. We envisage the Library's role as supporting our colleagues in the NHS by providing guidance to our members on accessing and using resources that we may not ourselves provide. The Library has a strong relationship with its users and we have the means to communicate with all members of the Society. With these advantages we are in a good position to provide support in the use of all information resources that our members are likely to use.

Returning to the electronic theme, another role that the Library is taking on is that of a portal for information related to pharmacy. The redesign of the Library's part of the Society's website will support this objective of becoming a first port of call for pharmacists seeking information.

Finally, a word about our audience. Traditionally the Library has supported the information needs of registered pharmacists and students (both those studying the MPharm degree and those in their pre-registration year). However, recent years have seen the role of the pharmacy technician expanding. As the Society is now maintaining a register of technicians the Library has widened its access policy to include them. Similarly stock acquisition policy has incorporated items on subjects of relevance to this specific group.

Again there is further potential for an increased Library audience. In London, the headquarters of the RPSGB, health professionals are well supported by the large network of libraries. However, this is not always the case in other parts of the UK. In Edinburgh the RPSGB has a Scottish Department with its own library. The facilities in both RPSGB libraries could be of use to a much wider audience, and for this reason they are made available not only to pharmacists but to other health professionals where there is a need.

The Library is part of the RPSGB's Information Centre and as such works directly alongside the Technical Information Service which employs information pharmacists to provide a specialist enquiry service on medicines, clinical aspects and pharmacy practice for the members and other healthcare professionals.

So in summary, how will the RPSGB Library continue to support the changing role of the pharmacist? We will build upon the firm foundations of the print collections while expanding our electronic collection to further our objective of bringing information to the desktop of our members. We will increase our role as facilitators in information discovery and we will capitalise on our strength as a specialist in the subject of pharmacy to become the primary information portal for pharmacists. In this way, as pharmacists address the challenges that now face them, we will continue to provide support all the way.

For further information about or comments upon this article, please contact Sarah Butler, Information Librarian for the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, on 020 7572 2301 or e-mail [sarah.butler@rpsgb.org](mailto:sarah.butler@rpsgb.org).

## **CSP Library and Information Services – support on offer**

**Andrea Peace**

**Library and Information Services Manager**  
**The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy**  
[peacea@csp.org.uk](mailto:peacea@csp.org.uk)

**Please note:** The CSP is re-launching its website (with new URLs for most resources) at about the same time that this edition of *Libraries for Nursing Bulletin* reaches you. To avoid confusion, and to save space I have avoided publishing two sets of URLs per resource, and have therefore kept all mentions of the CSP website to a minimum. The basic address of the site is going to remain the same: <http://www.csp.org.uk> All CSP resources mentioned should be easily located either via using our new search engine, or by using the menu options available on the new site.