

Cancer information in the Library: The Mid Anglia Libraries Project

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The mid Anglia Libraries Cancer Information Project is a co-operative project supported by the Mid Anglia Cancer Network and Macmillan Cancer Relief and supported by Suffolk County Council through its public library service, Colchester Institute and Anglia Polytechnic University. With the aim of providing up-to-date, accessible and reliable information about cancer, it is part of a national scheme to make information about cancer available to patients and carers, after research showed that despite information being available it was not easily available to those that needed it. The Department of Health and NHS both endorse the project.

It is aimed at a wide range of audiences across the Eastern Region united by a need for information relating to cancer, including patients and their carers, healthcare workers, students, lecturers and teachers and the public.

The collection packs consist of directories, books and pamphlets, plus a few audiotapes and videotapes, totalling about one hundred items and costing about £100. Most items are produced by the charity CancerBACUP, but publications by the Audit Commission, the Lymphoma Association and Cruse Bereavement Care are also included. The

information covers all aspects and types of cancer: prevention, diagnosis and treatments and issues such as diet, nutrition, complementary therapies, spiritual care, finance, loss, bereavement and support groups. For example, items range from the book by Susan Varley, called 'Badger's parting gifts' published in 1984 by Andersen, written for children and dealing with death and bereavement to the book by John Diamond called 'C: because cowards get cancer too' published in 1999 by Vermilion.

The project was launched on February 15th 2005 and so far packs have been distributed to participating libraries: Suffolk public libraries (Ipswich, Bury St Edmonds, Lowestoft, Beccles, Felixstowe, Haverhill, Newmarket, Stowmarket, Sudbury, Woodbridge) and Epping public library in Essex, Colchester Institute libraries in Colchester and Clacton, and Anglia Polytechnic University library in Chelmsford. There will be an Information Manager and monitoring of usage will be undertaken.

Implementation of the project took about a year and included decision on choice of materials, distribution and publicity and involved several meetings of the steering group. Promotional leaflets and posters were distributed via GP surgeries, acute hospitals, oncology departments, PCTs, pharmacies and libraries. Public libraries are central to the project as they are often community centres, have Internet access and also most importantly experienced library staff to deal with enquiries.

Similar projects have been organised in other parts of the UK, for example, Ellesmere Port and the Wirral, but here the self-help materials are supported by a peripatetic Information facilitator who works at different libraries on set days.

A longer article about this project should be appearing in the HLG newsletter later this year, but for the moment, more information about the project can be obtained by contacting:

Maurice Wakeham, Academic Liaison Librarian Health & Social Care
m.wakeham@apu.ac.uk who was on the planning and implementation group

Alternatively more detailed help or advice about cancer or information about the project, the following free sources may be useful:

- Macmillan CancerLine 0808 808 2020 (free phone)
- Macmillan Cancer Relief www.macmillan.org.uk
- Cancer BACUP www.cancerbacup.org.uk
UK helpline: 0808 800 1234
- Suffolk Library service <http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/libraries/news/cancerinfo.htm>