



Libraries *for* Nursing

Health Libraries Group Conference 2006: Libraries for Nursing seminar Changing audiences for health information- where next?

Frances Norton

Head of the Wellcome Library

As one of Health Libraries Group's sub-groups, Libraries for Nursing hosted a seminar at this year's HLG Conference in Eastbourne. Our special guest speaker was Frances Norton from the Wellcome Library in London, who spoke about "Changing Audiences for Health Information" (tying in with the conference theme of expanding roles).

Frances' particular interest in changing audiences is related to the Wellcome Library's mission of reaching the public and serving their interests in general matters of science and medicine. Using MORI statistics Frances illustrated that, although affected by biomedical issues in everyday life, the general public was not scientifically literate. When recent media coverage suggested a link between the MMR vaccine and autism, many parents refused to vaccinate their children without realising that this might pose an even greater risk if a measles epidemic were to break out.

The Wellcome Library aims to increase awareness of biomedical science by becoming a major new venue to engage the public with scientific information.

Frances has been profiling the audience they hope to attract (not just regular museum and gallery visitors but also local businesses and tourists visiting London) in order to get a more focused idea of their potential customers.

The profile of the Library has been raised through special events and media coverage – for example exploring the real stories behind popular scientific myths. Pupils from local schools visited the Library and then produced mock newspaper headlines about what they learned.

Some librarians might be uncomfortable with concepts such as branding and market research, but if we really do want to reach out to new audiences and to treat our library users like “customers” (rather than just paying lip service to the term) then perhaps, like Frances, we need to look to the corporate world for ideas on how to present our services.

The Wellcome Library is undoubtedly a unique resource quite different to those where most LfN members work. However, the re-imagining which it has undergone offers valuable lessons to us all.

Thanks to Frances for a very colourful and entertaining presentation.

For more information about the Wellcome Library, its collections and services please visit:

<http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/>

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