

have a clear audit trail so where we are spending our money, the decisions we have taken in order to spend it and what we are doing with are professional time. The statistics we provide need to say something, to speak to the people who hold the purse strings. We need to be visible or the purse strings may well pull closed.

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#### Evaluating training: issues for nursing librarians to consider

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#### Introduction

All health librarians, whether practising in the NHS or an academic setting, devote a large amount of their time to training users. This may range from helping student nurses to find an article or a consultant nurse to find and apply the latest research evidence to inform their practice. At the same time libraries are under pressure to demonstrate that the services they provide make a difference and/or are effective. Evidence from systematic reviews suggests that there is limited evidence that the training provided by health libraries is effective (Brettle 2003; Garg and Turtie 2003). Furthermore and perhaps more crucially, it has also been suggested that there is a lack of validated measures with which to evaluate training (Brettle, 2003; Koufogiannakis 2006). So given the pressure to demonstrate that the services provided are making a difference, what measures and methods can nursing librarians use to evaluate the training they provide?

Many librarians evaluate their training by asking those trained to complete a questionnaire at the end of the session. This provides useful information – but usually about whether participants have been happy with the training itself or whether they found it useful. Some go a step further and ask participants if they think their knowledge or skills have improved or if they think this will improve their practice. However this is still very subjective and doesn't tell us if participants have actually learned anything during training or whether the training has made any difference. Also what is usually

recorded are participants' impressions as they leave the session – not whether the training has had any effect over a longer period of time. What is needed are more objective methods of measuring whether training has made a difference.

#### **Difficulties in evaluating training interventions**

Evaluating the impact of training isn't easy and there are a number of factors to bear in mind when setting up an evaluation of a training intervention. Drescher et al (2004) suggest that factors unrelated to the training provided may have an effect, including:

- Participants with different training needs
- Variation in experience
- Different learning styles
- Environmental/organisational factors prevent putting the training into practice
- Measuring over the short/long term is likely to produce different results.

Rabine and Caldwell (2000) suggested that academic librarians have more difficulties in evaluating than other academics. These include:

- Libraries don't always offer courses or have students enrolled in courses (and therefore don't have ready made groups to evaluate/compare)
- Don't necessarily have steady/regular contact with students over a period of time
- The need for skills varies from discipline to discipline and at each level
- Libraries often focus on the needs of individuals at one point in time not on a set curriculum
- Often there are no learning outcomes (so nothing to measure against).

NHS librarians – in addition to the problems described above also are faced with:

- Providing training for clinicians in practice as well as those in training
- Wider variety of information/training needs – information for direct patient care as well as continuing professional development
- Library users with little time to attend training or practice skills afterwards
- Different types of training provided by a wide range of staff
- Users with limited computer or information literacy skills but complex information requirements (i.e. a steep learning curve to achieve the skills they need)