

Back in 1998 we advertised an LfN Research Grant:



Research Grant

Libraries for Nursing would like to promote and encourage research by our members. To achieve this aim we would like to make a research grant of £500 available to a member of LfN to help cover costs such as printing, software, postage etc.

Any research of relevance to nursing, midwifery and health visiting will be considered. Topics might include: distance learning initiatives and evaluation, user education, use of the internet and CDROMs, audit and evaluation issues and the developments of Service Level Agreements. Other relevant (nursing, midwifery and/or health visiting) research projects would, of course, be considered.

Karen Blackhall of St George's was awarded the grant. The following article gives the background to her subsequent work, partly sponsored by LfN!

Nurses' use of evidence based information

Karen Blackhall

When I first decided to carry out a research project I was working at the Medical Library in St. George's Hospital Medical School (SGHMS). My working day was busy and varied. As one of the senior library assistants I facilitated at teaching sessions and ran my own weekly session for anyone who cared to turn up. This gave me an interesting insight into staff and student activities throughout SGHMS, St. George's Hospital Trust and

The Joint Faculty of Healthcare Sciences (now called the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences).

The FHSCS was a relatively new concept brought about by the merging of teaching services for nurses at both St. George's Nursing Faculty and Kingston University. Many courses are taught between the two centres giving those registered with the FHSCS instant access to a rich source of medical, nursing and scientific information based at two sites.

The SGHMS Information Services staff are used to the changing needs of the community and every effort is made to fulfil the demands of students and staff alike. By the late nineties there was an awareness of the need to incorporate the concept of evidence based practice into teaching at SGHMS. Medical students were becoming involved with problem-based learning and required evidence-based information to be

made easily available to them. As well as this, nurses were increasingly being encouraged to examine and become involved with nursing research, with an aim to improving patient care and their own professional development. More courses were made available to all areas of the nursing community, and for many a new opportunity emerged to have access to a rich source of printed and electronic information.

Although there was an increase in the amount of evidence-based information available, it did not necessarily follow that the information was being utilised by all areas of the membership. It was interesting to ask the question "How familiar are some of the smaller sections of the membership with evidence based information?"

In order to choose a sample group for the study, I looked at courses being run by the FHSCS. As the study primarily aimed to examine nurses' use of evidence based information and the barriers they might encounter, I decided to choose a group who would be involved with examining and applying research. Nurses embarking on the *Research Methods Module* were chosen as this course explores methods of research and how it can be used to support nursing practice.

As the course was a compulsory module for those undertaking the BSc (Hons) Nursing or Midwifery studies I hoped to achieve a fairly random sample of the nursing population. The course is a popular one and attracts attendees from diverse backgrounds. Community midwifery, elderly care, communicable diseases and pediatrics were just some of the areas covered by my sample group.

My main apprehension about studying a group of nurses was that they have very busy schedules. My sample group were also about to start a course and I was asking them to help me too! I anticipated some reluctance to complete the questionnaires and wondered how many would agree to be interviewed. My fears were soon dispelled, however with the return of the questionnaires and more than half agreeing to be interviewed.

The questionnaires were enlightening and provided valuable data. The interviews were informative and thought provoking, giving an insight into the varied needs of the nursing community. For me, an interesting aspect of the exercise was being able to talk to those nurses who would not normally have regular access to such a comprehensive information service. I have previously worked in smaller off-site libraries with very limited services, so I anticipated some of the points that emerged. Issues such as *limited range of journals, restricted access to electronic information and inconvenient opening times* all sounded sadly familiar.

Those nurses working in smaller establishments with little or no information service tend to rely on colleagues attending courses to share any new information with them. The process of information circulation has obvious benefits and most of the nurses interviewed mentioned some method of sharing information and resources.

It was acknowledged by many of the interviewees that most evidence-based information is available electronically. Some had used such resources very little but those who had, recognised their value. Accessing information electronically however did not seem to cause

concern for many of the interviewees as most were experienced computer users. They seem to regard a home computer as a useful asset to their work and suggest a need for easier access to work-related resources from their home computer. Some of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of acquiring accurate searching skills, however, as they were aware of the cost to themselves of being online for long periods if a search proves difficult.

The most frequently mentioned topic was the lack of time available for searching and reading information. This seems to be regarded as a fundamental issue for all of those interviewed regardless of their specialty, level or whether comprehensive information sources are available on site. They suggest a need for on the spot information so that access can be gained while in the ward or department without having to take time out to visit the library. Idealistically, installing an online computer backed up with expertise from an information professional would seem an appropriate answer. In reality however, there may be barriers preventing this solution.

The study suggests a need for flexibility and mobility regarding staff and resources in information provision. If information managers acknowledge the variation in demand, needs and skills of nursing staff, services can be tailored to the individual. This would enable healthcare information providers to become more involved in the process of improved patient care through evidence based practice.

The grant from Libraries for Nursing enabled me to conduct this research. Working on the project gave me the opportunity to gain

experience in the research process as well as an insight into the needs of a small group of information service users. Integrated library and information services such as those provided at SGHMS are on a large scale, serving a diverse community and it is easy to lose touch with the needs of individual users.

Regular monitoring provides an opportunity for those involved to express opinions and voice concerns about the service they require. Studies such as this one, provide valuable information on which to base changes and improvements to services.

BOOK REVIEW

Roger Gomm and Celia Davies (editors) (2000)

Using evidence in health and social care. London, Sage

Publications in association with the Open University.

0761964959. £15.99.

This book is part of the core text for the Open University course K302 - *Critical practice in health care*, and is:

"... very much a practitioners book. It is a book for people who want to read research and apply it in practice ..." (p xi.)

Evidence based practice was formally proposed by Archie Cochrane in the early 1970s and has increasingly become a key principle of health