



University of Salford
A Greater Manchester University



Executive Summary

Do NHS Libraries Have a Role in Providing Information to Patients, Carers and the Public?

June 2008

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Institute for Health & Social Care Research

Funded by the North West Health Care Libraries Unit



About Us

We are experienced researchers with a strong emphasis on real world research that addresses the needs of practitioners, service users and health and social care organisations.

The centre objectives are:

- To develop nursing and midwifery practice and education through collaborative research
- To work with other stakeholders in identifying priority areas for research, evaluation and service development
- To undertake research and scholarship of national and international standing

Research expertise includes:

- **Children and families:** evaluating services for children, women and families, preparation to work in these fields, and clinical research
- **Developing clinical practice through research:** includes research into fundamental nursing care and development of practice in key areas of need
- **Information and evidence:** develops approaches to the classification and use of nursing data, information and evidence based nursing science
- **Professional education:** includes international projects in the study of education
- **Mental health care:** focuses on research into mental health policy, education and practice, and the organisation of mental health care
- **Older people and rehabilitation:** evaluating initiatives/services aimed at older people, exploration of people's experiences of ageing, diversity/inclusion in later life

Enterprise and International Links

- We engage in project and consultancy work and evaluation projects
- We support new product and service initiatives in partnership with external colleagues and business communities
- We have active and extensive international links
- Partnerships have been forged between staff and students in Australia, Africa, USA, Russia, Malta, Finland, Holland and Germany amongst others

**Do NHS Libraries Have a Role in
Providing Information to Patients,
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Research Team

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Ten years ago, the UK government outlined a strategy that aimed to ‘ensure that patients, carers and the public have the information necessary to make decisions about their own treatment and care’ and suggested that the ‘NHS has a major responsibility to provide or enable access to relevant and reliable information’ (DH 1998). Given that one of the main roles of an NHS Library is the provision of access and training to health information for NHS staff and that health librarians are skilled in accessing, using and to some extent understanding health care information, to some it may seem a logical step for NHS Libraries to be involved in the provision of health information to patients. This may not necessarily mean opening up the library to patients, but supporting other NHS staff to provide information to patients. However there are also issues about duplication, appropriateness and implementation that should be taken into consideration when examining the role of the NHS Library in providing information for patient care. This report describes a project that aimed to explore these issues by asking:

- What public sector based information services are currently provided to patients and carers in the North West and by whom?
- What are the views of key stakeholders regarding:
 - Whether NHS Libraries should provide information to patients and carers?
 - Whether NHS Libraries could provide information to patients and carers?
 - What type of services could be offered?
 - What roles could NHS Libraries play?
- If NHS Libraries were to provide information to patients and carers, what would be needed to facilitate and/or support them?

By answering these research questions, the report aims to provide:

1. A ‘map’ of the provision of public sector based patient information services in the North West
2. An overview of stakeholder views regarding the role of NHS Libraries in the provision of information to patients

Methods

A self-report survey was developed, and administered electronically across stakeholder groups to enable comparative analysis of different perceptions. This was combined with a comprehensive Internet search of Trust and Public Authority websites to generate a deeper understanding of what current information services were available to patients. The survey was emailed to 218 stakeholders (57 Directors of Nursing; 26 Directors of Public Health; 67 Patient Advice and Liaison Managers (PALS); 50 NHS Library Managers; and 26 Public Library Managers).

Key Findings

A total of 83 (39%) of returned questionnaires were usable. The results highlighted both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the perceptions of the different stakeholders and together with the information gained from the Internet searches provided an 'indicative map' of the public sector based patient information services available in the North West.

- There is a wide range of services and initiatives available with the aim of providing information to patients but service provision throughout the region is neither equitable nor systematic.
- There is an inconsistency of knowledge amongst stakeholders regarding the availability of services.
- Six NHS Trusts confirmed that their libraries already provide access to patients. There are five examples of dedicated patient information libraries and a wide range of partnership initiatives between the NHS and the Public Library sector to provide information to the public.
- The majority of stakeholders believed that patients should have access to NHS Libraries.
- A small majority believe it is realistic that NHS Libraries provide information to patients. There are significant differences between the views of NHS Librarians and other stakeholders groups. The former are less likely to agree that patients should have access to NHS Libraries and that it is realistic that NHS Libraries provide information to patients.

- NHS Librarians concerns are centred on funding, inappropriateness of resources, clinicians and patients sharing facilities, lack of training in dealing with patients and the implications of providing information to patients.
- There were mixed views on how facilities should be organised. A separate area for patients within an NHS Library was seen as more preferable than shared facilities although this was still not an attractive option to some NHS Library Managers.
- The main barrier to NHS Libraries providing information services to patients is a lack of funding.
- Current resources are aimed at NHS staff, however the majority of stakeholders did not believe these were inappropriate for patients.
- NHS Librarians were less likely to agree about the appropriateness of current resources and stressed the need for increased funding to purchase both appropriate resources, additional staff to be able to cope with the increased demand on services and training to deal with a different type of enquirer and enquiries.
- The majority of stakeholders perceived that PALS should play more of a frontline role in providing information to patients and NHS Libraries could be used as a backup or supporting role. However there was disagreement as to how this should be achieved.
- The majority of NHS Libraries are already supporting clinical staff in the provision of patient information and there is a clear role for NHS Libraries to provide this type of support. More promotion in this area would increase the library profile.
- A few libraries are already providing information directly to patients by a range of means. There is some support for these methods to be adopted by other libraries.
- All stakeholders were positive about the role that public libraries could play in providing patient information.
- Public libraries are clear about their role in “signposting” the public to quality resources but not providing medical advice or guidance.
- Public library staff have customer service and enquiry skills to help the public find information but would value more specialised training from NHS Librarians.
- There are a number of opportunities for collaboration between the NHS and Public Libraries, including NHS Librarians providing training and support in specialised health resources and the potential opportunity for public libraries to provide training in customer care issues.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the aim of this project was to focus on the role of the NHS Library in providing patient information, three successful models of information provision are operating within the region and were highlighted and discussed throughout:

- NHS Library provision of information to patients
 - The dedicated patient information library
 - Partnerships between NHS and public libraries
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- Co-ordination amongst the plethora of services provided is needed. A forum to enable the sharing of information regarding the availability of services, good practice and roles of different providers amongst stakeholders would reduce duplication and confusion.
 - The dedicated patient information library has support, but is likely to be costly.
 - Further collaboration and partnerships between NHS and Public Libraries are viewed positively are a potentially viable option and should be explored further, building on the links and lessons learned from the NW NHS Public Libraries Partnership Project.
 - The majority of stakeholders were in favour of the provision of patient information by NHS Libraries, provided adequate funding to cover resources and training are identified.
 - Information sharing/training from libraries that already provide access may be a useful step forward in encouraging more NHS Libraries to explore different ways of providing patient information.
 - A clear role for NHS Libraries needs to be established (as public libraries have done). This would give NHS Libraries clear operational guidelines and help identify areas of training that need to be developed.
 - NHS Libraries are already demonstrating that they play an important role in the provision of patient information by working with clinicians, this role should be widely promoted to maximise the impact that they are making. Links with PALS should be established or extended to examine how the two services can work together and provide mutual support.

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