

The new National Library for Health

An electronic library for the NHS, the National electronic Library for Health (NeLH)¹ was established six years ago in response to the 1998 NHS information strategy document, *Information for Health*. Since its inception, the NeLH has had a pivotal role in enhancing access to health information for NHS clinicians and managers within England; and has become very much part of life for NHS librarians. It has complemented the collections and services offered by local NHS libraries, being used by around 200,000 people every month. It has a strong identity as a source of authoritative evidence and best practice to support health care. The clinical databases and full-text journals provided via the National Core Content project² have been a particularly valuable asset.

In organisational terms, the development of NeLH took place entirely separately from that of NHS library services. In recent years the pattern of NHS library service delivery has been broadly determined by the Health Services Guideline *Library and information services* (HSG(97)47)³. This focussed attention on the importance of library services for the development of evidence-based practice and patient care, and the need for access to the best evidence. Every trust was required to produce its own strategy for library services. A programme of library and information service modernisation followed, including access to the Internet (sometimes very much against the wishes of trust IT departments!), development of intranets, region-wide contracting for electronic content, and a focus on user education. A national library accreditation framework (the HeLicon scheme)⁴ was developed, and national contracts established for the purchase of books and electronic resources. Subsequently, service provision and development were influenced by NHS continuing professional development and lifelong learning policies⁵, and by the *NHS Plan*.⁶ *Shifting the Balance of Power*⁷ led to a major reorganisation of NHS library structures, and focussed library resources at Workforce Development Confederation level.⁸

Following a recommendation by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), the NHS National Knowledge Service commissioned a review of NHS library policy. The review was carried out by TFPL, and published in April 2004.⁹ The report highlighted a number of strategic weaknesses in the present organisation of NHS library services. Their distribution and funding is historically determined; in some areas, local services are fragmented, leading to duplication and gaps. There is a lack of coordination in some areas between national and local initiatives. Many NHS libraries are small and relatively poorly staffed; there is a lack of workforce capacity and skills to support new ways of working.

Ben Toth, director of the NLH programme, identifies other issues facing NHS libraries.^{10 11} Libraries of all kinds are facing increasing competition from search engines such as Google, which has become an information service of first resort for many users in preference to library catalogues. The acceleration towards provision of digital, networked information services has been a trend in all areas of academic and professional library work, accentuated by the open access movement within scholarly publishing, and proliferation of institutional e-print archives.¹² Within the NHS, organisational changes, and reconfigurations of service patterns, have often had the effect of cutting clinical staff off from easy access to library services. This is a particular problem for mental health and primary care staff, whose organisations are

dispersed in numerous small sites across a wide geographical area.

The TFPL report made a number of positive recommendations about the structure and organisation of NHS library services. In particular, it proposed that a top level national champion be identified; that the national leadership of library services be clarified in terms of its role and organisational location; and that a programme to develop national library services be progressed in partnership with local services.

The concept of a *National Library for Health*, set within a wider clinical knowledge framework, was originated by Muir Gray at the DLNet residential conference held in March 2004.¹³ and was agreed at a colloquium for senior NHS librarians.¹⁴ Its partners are the NHS Library and Knowledge Development Network (LKDN: formerly the Regional Librarians' Group)¹⁵, the NHS Library Advisor¹⁶, the current NeLH team, and the NHS Core Content Group. Following the publication of TFPL's policy review, a series of roadshows was held across the country between June and August 2004 to promote the National Library for Health concept and to seek the views of a wider range of health librarians.

The levels of attendance (over 500 people over the course of the summer) at the roadshows reflected the highly controversial character of some of the policy review's findings, and also misgivings about the NLH proposals. Apart from its analysis of the weaknesses of existing NHS library services, the report expressed criticism in several places of what it saw as an excessive emphasis on collection management, and appeared to many NHS librarians to be promoting a highly-centralised, predominantly digitally-based service concept, based upon a pharmaceutical industry model, which failed to take into account the circumstances and needs of the NHS (notably, the limitations of IT infrastructure and IT skills, the preferences of users for printed materials, and the need to maintain local specialised collections) and which would inevitably devalue existing services in the eyes of users.¹⁷ Criticism was voiced of what were perceived as weaknesses in the NLH programme's methodology and approach.¹⁸ The view was also expressed that the NLH was being foisted on the health library community as a *fait accompli*, with insufficient authority and following an inadequate process of consultation.¹⁹

The feedback from the roadshows was analysed in detail by the authors of the original report.²⁰ The NLH programme team subsequently responded to the criticisms by publishing a comprehensive series of responses to questions gathered from them,²¹ and also by putting out a detailed consultation plan.²²

The aim of the National Library for Health, according to the published sources, is to integrate electronic resources with physical NHS library collections, so that electronic resources and print-based library services are no longer treated and managed separately. It is intended to build on existing regional and local initiatives, transforming existing NHS libraries into a more closely coordinated network, and offering a more closely integrated information service to the NHS. The fact that such a process is being led by NeLH rather than by lead librarians within workforce development confederations/strategic health authorities is explained as follows: "given the drivers for change it was always likely that change would start from a national service".²¹ The key concept determining the balance between 'national' and 'local' is user need: where a service is widely required, in a similar format, and can be economically provided on an NHS-wide basis, then it should be procured once for the

NHS. If a resource or service is based on the professional skills of librarians, or is site-specific, or cannot be procured on an NHS-wide basis, then it should be procured 'many times' and managed by individual libraries, primary care trusts or strategic health authorities.²⁰

The NLH programme has two main foci: 1) the changes described above in the way that NHS library services are organised, managed and funded, and 2) the development of new national digital services, based on a common information architecture and integration with the NHS Institute for Learning, Skills and Innovation (formerly the NHSU)²³ and the National Programme for IT in the NHS (NPfIT)²⁴.

The Department of Health spends around £100m - £150m per year on knowledge, of which £30-£40m is spent on library services¹⁰; the long-term goal of NLH is to improve the effectiveness of this expenditure. The development of NLH is planned to occur without closure of library units, undue centralisation, or layoffs of staff, and to be funded from existing library and NPfIT budgets. This integrated service is to be based upon a national service framework (NSF) for library services, comparable to the NHS clinical national service frameworks, which will define standards and service outcomes for NHS library services and provide a management structure. The NHS Library and Knowledge Development Network (formerly the Regional Librarians Group) will be responsible for producing this. A related accreditation process will draw upon the existing HeLicon framework, although there is a possibility that LibQual+ may be used.²⁵ In due course the NLH will connect with other library networks, such as those of academic libraries, public libraries, and independent health libraries. Initially there will be a management board and a Librarians' Council, but the aim is to make the NLH network self-organising as far as possible.

The NLH home page is now available at www.library.nhs.uk. The first phase of NLH is planned for delivery from November 2004. It will include a number of new NHS-wide services, as follows:

- 1) an NHS search engine, being developed by the library system vendor Fretwell-Downing. This is a federated search that will search all the content purchased by NHS library services. Users will be able to search national resources, plus local ones within their own area. It was intended to launch this during Health Libraries Week in November 2004, but the launch has now been delayed until January 2005. The search engine will be incorporated within the common user interface (a customised Internet Explorer browser) - being developed as part of the NHS-Microsoft enterprise-wide agreement²⁶;
- 2) a personalised alerts service, also available within the common user interface;
- 3) integration of library content (such as the drug database produced by UK Medicines Information) with the research task pane in the NHS version of Microsoft Office 2003, and within electronic patient records;
- 4) an NHS-wide primary care current awareness service using RSS. This project is being coordinated by primary care librarians within the NHS, and will supersede existing local current awareness services²⁷;
- 5) support for NPfIT through integrating library content with clinical workflow via the Map of Medicine. This is a knowledge support tool for doctors which is currently being developed at the Royal Free Hospital by a company called Medic-to-Medic²⁸, and is being rolled out as part of NPfIT. NHS librarians are being encouraged to become involved in generating local content for it;

- 6) an NHS e-print server, enabling NHS staff to make electronic copies of research papers quickly and easily;
- 7) A pilot answering service for clinical questions²⁹;
- 8) A pilot document delivery service, also integrated with NPfIT. Its possible shape has not so far been determined, although business issues are currently being investigated;
- 9) A trial of e-books services using MyiLibrary³⁰. The first collection being offered to users covers mental health.

Generally a service-oriented architecture (web services) approach is being adopted in the development of these new resources and services. In the medium term, ATHENS will continue to be used for authenticating access to NHS resources. The single sign-on which is being implemented as part of NPfIT is interoperable with ATHENS, since both services use the Security Assertions Markup Language (SAML)³¹. In parallel with the higher education community, “the transition to Shibboleth interoperability will be explored for NHS use”²⁰. (Shibboleth is an open-source web authorisation architecture widely used in the U.S. and in some other countries.)³²

Work on the development of new “Specialist Libraries” to add to those that are already part of NeLH will continue. These specialty libraries provide quick and easy access to the best available information. They are intended to be both collections of material and communities of practice of all those interested in generating, organising, mobilising and utilising knowledge.^{33 34}

Underpinning the change programme is a series of other activities that have recently begun: a user survey of NHS staff, further consultations with NHS librarians; an analysis of existing NHS library funding, in order to understand present arrangements, identify threats, and propose a new funding model; and professional development for librarians, delivered online (FOLIO)³⁵ to develop some of the new professional skills that will be required. There are also proposals for a more unified approach to content acquisition and management, and for a communications strategy to engage stakeholders, principally strategic health authorities.³⁶

More information about NLH may be found at www.library.nhs.uk and on the DLnet weblog, which is at www.dlnet.blogspot.com.

Catherine Ebenezer

Information Systems Manager, Royal College of Midwives

December 2004

¹ www.nelh.nhs.uk

² Gibbens, S (2004). The National Core Content. Presentation at: Access to information: bringing together librarians and the health service. RCM academic conference 01/12/04. At www.rsm.ac.uk/accessinfo04/present.htm [01/12/04]. See also http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/news_ncc.asp [01/12/04]

³ Available via <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/LettersAndCirculars/fs/en>

⁴ Fowler, C and Trinder V. (2002) Accreditation of library and information services in the health sector. A checklist to support assessment : 2nd edition. <http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/librarian/accreditation.asp> [04/10/04]

⁵ e.g. Department of Health (2000). A health service of all the talents: Developing the NHS workforce consultation - document on the review of workforce planning. London: DH.; Department of Health. (2001). Working together, learning together: a framework for lifelong learning. London: DH;

-
- Department of Health (2004). The NHS knowledge and skills framework (NHS KSF) and the development review process. London: DH. Available via <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/>
- ⁶ Department of Health (2000). The NHS Plan: a plan for investment, a plan for reform. London: DH. <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/>
- ⁷ Department of Health (2001). Shifting the balance of power within the NHS: securing delivery. London: DH. Available via <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/>
- ⁸ NHS Library Advisor page: <http://www.publications.doh.gov.uk/ipu/nhsla/> [02/10/04]
- ⁹ Herman C and Ward S. (2004) The NHS library policy review – developing the strategic roadmap. London: TFPL. http://www.library.nhs.uk/NHS_Library_Policy_Review_final_report_April_04.doc [02/10/04]
- ¹⁰ Toth B. (2004) Beyond the fragments: towards the development of an integrated health library service. At <http://www.library.nhs.uk/plan.doc> [02/10/04]
- ¹¹ Toth B. (2004) An integrated library for the NHS. *Library and Information Update* 3(10) 28-29
- ¹² see, e.g. House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, Tenth Report (2004): *Scientific publications: free for all?* At <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmsctech/399/39902.htm> [04/10/04]
- ¹³ <http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/dlnet/residential04/default.asp> [02/10/04]
- ¹⁴ Turner A. (2004) Report from the National Library for Health Colloquium held on 25th March 2004. At <http://www.library.nhs.uk/colloquium%20report.ppt> [02/10/04]
- ¹⁵ www.lkdn.nhs.uk [02/10/04]
- ¹⁶ NHS Library Advisor: <http://www.publications.doh.gov.uk/ipu/nhsla/> [02/10/04]
- ¹⁷ e.g. White P. NLH proposal critique – long. Message posted to LIS-MEDICAL 3/08/04. Available via www.jiscmail.ac.uk [30/11/04]
- ¹⁸ e.g. Cumbers, B. Message on LONDONLINKS ??? date
- ¹⁹ e.g. George E. Re: National Library for Health – involvement. Message to LONDONLINKS 05/08/04.
- ²⁰ Ward S and Winterman V (2004). Roadshow feedback analysis. London: TFPL. At www.library.nhs.uk/forLibrarians/ [30/11/04]
- ²¹ Responses to questions gathered from the summer roadshows. At www.library.nhs.uk/forLibrarians/roadshowresponses.htm [29/11/04]
- ²² Turner A. (2004) NLH consultation document: draft communication and consultation plan: phases 1 and 2. At www.library.nhs.uk/forLibrarians/ [30/11/04]
- ²⁷ <http://mylibrary.com/MyiLibrary/welcome.asp> [30/11/04]
- ²² <http://www.npfit.nhs.uk> [02/10/04]
- ²³ <http://www.nhsu.nhs.uk/webportal/> [02/10/04]
- ²⁵ Ellis, T. Accreditation and IS: where are we now? Presentation at: Access to information: bringing together librarians and the health service. RCM academic conference 01/12/04. At www.rsm.ac.uk/accessinfo04/present.htm [01/12/04]
- ²⁶ <http://www.microsoft.com/office/editions/prodinfo/technologies/research.msp> [02/10/04]
- ²⁷ <http://dlnet.blogspot.com/2004/09/primary-care-current-awareness-service.html>
- ²⁸ Map of Medicine: www.mapofmedicine.com [02/10/04]
- ²⁹ <http://www.clinicalanswers.nhs.uk/> [01/12/04]
- ³⁰ www.myiLibrary.com [30/11/04]
- ³¹ Toth, B. (2004). Convergence between IT systems and content – librarian’s perspective. Presentation at: Access to information: bringing together librarians and the health service. RCM academic conference 01/12/04. At www.rsm.ac.uk/accessinfo04/present.htm [01/12/04]
- ³² <http://www.athensams.net/shibboleth/>

³³ Brice A. (2004) NeLH Specialist Libraries Programme [PowerPoint presentation]. At <http://www.library.nhs.uk/virtualroadshow.asp> [02/10/04]

³⁴ Brice A and Gray J M (2003). Knowledge is the enemy of disease. *Library and Information Update*, 2(3). At <http://www.cilip.org.uk/publications/updatemagazine/archive/archive2003/march/update0303b.htm?cssversion=printable> [04/10/04]

³⁵ www.nelh.nhs.uk/folio/

³⁶ Toth, B (2004). *Beyond the fragments*