

Health Librarians: Making a Difference



“ I can't imagine doing a job as a librarian which I'd enjoy more or find more rewarding. I feel privileged to contribute to improving patient care ”

Richard Brook, Clinical Librarian

Working in health libraries is varied, stimulating and rewarding. Health librarians run complex literature searches and horizon scan to support patient care, research, and improvements in health services. They develop and deliver training to help health professionals assess and make the best use of evidence. Many roles are embedded with health and management teams. Here are some examples.

Clinical Librarians

Clinical Librarians aim to spend as little time in the library as possible and as much as they can out and about in the hospital working alongside clinical teams as they care for patients.

They accompany, and are part of, multi-disciplinary teams including doctors, nurses and therapists on ward rounds as they visit patients. They look for evidence gaps and uncertainties, and find answers.



“ A recent search was turned around in less than three hours, and the clinicians commented that ‘This search...

was used directly used to inform a patients care and importantly, to counsel the family on a topic that they had wanted us to look into further. It was such a prompt response that enabled this to be useful”

Tom Roper

Outreach Librarian

The Outreach Librarian works with any NHS staff working in the community, often providing Library and Knowledge Services remotely. The users they work with range from GPs, through student nurses and paramedics, to the IT manager. They visit GP practices and community health centres to promote resources and provide training. The requests for information or support are varied and can be complex. They may be asked for evidence for writing local policies, answering patients’ questions, or professional development.

“ The role is incredibly rewarding. It keeps me constantly learning and growing in my role. I build relationships with organisations and individuals that allows me to support them in their information needs.”

Holly Case



Public Health and Commissioning Librarians

These librarians provide evidence-based knowledge and information and current awareness services to local Public Health teams (in the local council) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG). CCGs decide what clinical services need to be provided in an area, and which organisations will be paid to provide them. Librarians working with CCGs provide evidence to support local pathways of care. CCG staff also have a need for statistics and case studies from other CCGs.

Public health teams require information at population level. This can be very different from the clinical care of individual patients.

Every week is different. Working onsite means the librarian is immersed in the public health or commissioning team and their work.



“ I’ve had to learn new search skills and track down new resources to use, as well as get in to the mind-set of Public Health practitioners and Commissioners.”

Erica Rae

Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) Liaison Librarian

The AHSN promotes research and collaboration between the NHS, higher education and industry. This role involves developing relationships, conducting complex literature searches, providing reviews or summaries of the evidence, performing regular horizon scans for new technologies and innovations, and profiling NHS organisations to identify common themes and issues.



“ It’s a very stimulating job, no two searches or reviews are the same. I have had some great feedback and knowing that the work I do is helping to inform initiatives across the patch is very rewarding.”

Alison McLaren

“ Having a physical presence is beneficial... I get to know the people and the context of their work, so have a deeper understanding of what their information needs are.”

Frankie Marcelline



Library and Knowledge Services Manager

Service Managers have the autonomy to shape the service to meet the needs of their customers. They not only write their own development strategies, but get involved in shaping national strategy. They lead a small, diverse team, so they keep contact with their users and can see the difference their service makes.



“As an NHS library service manager you have a great deal of freedom to shape your future.”

Mike Roddham

Knowledge for Healthcare

Knowledge for Healthcare (HEE 2014) is the framework for the development of health libraries across England 2015–2020. Multiple work streams involving health librarians and partners are working on its implementation. The librarian workforce is central to our strategy and a number of resources have been published this year to underpin their personal and professional development as well as help employers understand what it is we do!

<https://hee.nhs.uk/our-work/research-learning-innovation/library-knowledge-services>

The Healthcare Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB for Health) can be used to support workforce planning at local, regional and national level. Employers and line managers will use it to aid their understanding of the competencies required of library and knowledge services staff and to inform role and service redesign, and support the recruitment and retention of staff. We want it to be used by individuals in developing their personal development plans, as part of the process of gaining professional registration and revalidation by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP).

The Learning Zone signposts librarians to key online resources to underpin personal and professional development – all the resources are open to anyone to use on our blog pages:

<http://kfh.libraryservices.nhs.uk/learning-zone/>

Interested in knowing more?

Visit a local health library: we can help you arrange this. Contact the regional library lead from this page:

<http://www.libraryservices.nhs.uk/lksl/lkslcontacts/>

Look for jobs: library and knowledge management jobs are advertised on NHS Jobs:

<http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>