

# INTERLINK

## Editorial

This edition of the newsletter is quite short this time - probably because it has come out on scheduled time for the first time ever and I haven't got months of backlog to clear!

If you have any reviews of products that would be of interest to ASHSL members: people news, exciting things that you have bought for your library, or meetings that you have been to, please send me details of them to share with other ASHSL members. It doesn't have to be a long contribution - I would be quite happy to accept a paragraph!

Thanks this month to the indefatigable Hazel Williamson, Alison McIntosh and Janice Grant for their contributions. An especial thank you to Alison and her staff for helping with the production of this magazine.

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## Conference Report

**Under One Umbrella 3: UMIST, Manchester,  
23rd - 25th June 1995**

This year's gathering of the Medical Health and Welfare Libraries Group of the Library Association took place as part of Under One Umbrella 3, a convergence of a variety of Groups holding parallel meetings, sharing the UMIST accommodation and participating in communal professional and social functions. From Friday till Sunday a programme of meetings was on offer, delegates being able to choose from about 25 at one time, from 'Converting Books to Bytes', through 'The Information Maze' to 'Wearing Three Hats'. As ever, an excellent trade exhibition accompanied the conference, allowing the opportunity to discuss new products and technological developments.

The weekend provided participants with the chance to meet colleagues with similar interests, learn of new developments from experts, meet trade exhibitors in an informal setting and enjoy the stimulating mixture of professional and social exchanges. It was exhausting, but certainly a worthwhile experience.

The meetings I attended were mostly under the auspices of the Information Technology Group and the Medical Health and Welfare Libraries Group. Two themes recurred as the weekend progressed, 'Evidence based medicine'; the unrelenting advance of technology and the latter's potential to enable maximum exploitation of the former. I shall briefly describe the content of the meetings I attended in order to convey the richness and diversity of the conference.

## Auditing Information Use

As at all the 'best' conferences, a 'fringe' programme accompanied the main business. This meeting saw the launch of a 'Toolkit' developed by the University of Wales and the British Library for health librarians to use to measure the effectiveness of the health information they provide. The Toolkit is the result of extensive research into clinicians' use of information, and consists of practical worksheets to assist librarians to target the specific areas of information use they wish to measure. The resulting statistics should provide measurable evidence of the efficiency of good information in making correct clinical decision, in a way clearly understood by clinicians and managers alike.

## Keynote address

As befits this, a prestigious national conference, an eminent public figure was invited to say a few uncontentious words. Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for National Heritage, duly obliged with an unequivocal assurance of his Department's commitment to public libraries, free at the point of use, sufficiently funded to further both educational and business needs. However, as is common with other 'public' services, he anticipated a mixture of public and private funding and the contracting out of certain services. To the approval of the delegates, Mr Dorrell, was courteous enough to invite questions, which he answered informatively.

## Labour's IT Agenda

In the absence of Chris Smith, Andrew Miler MP summarised Labour's intention to use the possibilities of the emerging broadband networks to be as widely accessible as possible. He saw all educational libraries, including schools, and health authorities being listed with the information providers on the ever-expanding 'Superhighway'. He warned, though, that the providers must be tightly controlled, as their pursuit of profit may not be in accord with the aim of extending the network as widely as possible.

## Getting started on the Internet

This was a very instructive talk by John Smith, the author of a new book on the Internet. His emphasis was on how to go about connecting to the Internet, rather than on the information to be obtained. He had sound advice for those contemplating linking up, concerning the various providers, the equipment required and the previous knowledge necessary. His message was that the final decision depends on each organisation's information requirements and how much they are willing to pay.

## The book in the age of technology

This was an excellent debate of the future of medical books and journals in the face of the proliferation of new methods of information delivery. The speaker approached the subject from the viewpoint of the publisher, the medical bookseller and the librarian. As expected, all, while recognising the impact of electronic media, were of the opinion that predictions of the demise of the book were premature.

Nigel Atkinson, of Cambridge University Press, identified the types of information still best stored in book form, for example, revision notes and bench books. He reminded us that not all readers have immediate access to the technology to use electronic media, for example, at home or in disadvantaged countries. He recognised the versatility offered by CD-ROM and expected that even more exciting developments will appear soon. He recognised that publishers must be responsive to the demands of their customers and be aware that they are entering a world much more complex than simply publishing books.

Don Noble, of Cambridge Medical Books, took the viewpoint that, far from the decline of the book, publishing and sales of books continue to increase. He cited the paradoxical case of the

proliferation of books about computers, and saw the main impact of the new technology being in the speed of production and the appearance of conventional books. His strong message is that the medical textbook will be with us for many years.

Tony McSean, the Librarian of the British Medical Association, warned against making predictions any further ahead than about five years. He looked, rather cynically, at the business of book production from the viewpoint of the author, the publisher and the librarian and concluded that the desire to impart information is only one among many reasons why books are still published, others being habit and search for prestige. While he judged that the book would remain for the foreseeable future, he predicted that medical journals would cease abruptly, possibly fairly soon, with their role being taken over by some new means of communication. However, all predictions could be rendered invalid with the appearance of some revolutionary new means of communication, such as new display technology, organic memory, or better wireless networking.

## What's New?

This session allowed four speakers the opportunity to describe their involvement in current research in medical information.

Julie Glanville brought us up to date on the database of systematic reviews of healthcare interventions being developed by the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York. The Centre is applying very strict criteria to identify high quality reviews with the purpose of conveying to managers information on the cost effectiveness of interventions. The database will be made available from Autumn this year with free online access, with a small charge for the manual.

Lois Green from the University of Central England discussed the difficulties of communicating health information in the community where funding is small and the customers have low expectations. She identified the greatest barrier as the indifference of the public and described the methods by which her team is attempting to overcome this.

Melanie Peffer, a Research Assistant at The Robert Gordon University, gave a very informative account of a British Library funded project studying the drug information needs of rheumatology patients. Several interesting trends were emerging from the research, which is still ongoing, such as the unquestioning attitude of the patients and the limited involvement of pharmacists in conveying information about the drugs.

Alison Ray from Scarborough Hospital drew the attention of medical librarians to the increasing therapeutic use of complementary and alternative techniques. She gave a useful talk on the terminology of these therapies, warning that some methods are still a long way from being accepted by many doctors.

## But will it work doctor?

Sunday's session for the Health Libraries Group consisted of an intensive workshop on 'Using evidence about effective health care with consumers and health professionals'. It took the format of presentations, group exercises and discussion and was led by Carol Lefebvre of the UK Cochrane Centre; Gill Needham of the CASP Project (Critical Appraisal Skills Programmes); and Bob Gann, of the Help for Health Trust. The emphasis was on how to make more effective use of the available information in order to make the most appropriate decisions. It was also stressed that such decisions are made by the consumer as well as by the clinician or manager.

The speakers described the efforts now being made to make widely available up-to-date research results on the clinical effectiveness of medical procedures. New technology is assisting the dissemination of the research, but the data is only as good as the quality of the original studies.

Carol Lefebvre described the work of the UK Cochrane Centre in establishing a database of high quality results, that is results of randomised controlled trials, and in ensuring that such trials are properly indexed in databases such as Medline. In addition, she discussed the value of reviews as evidence, by examining several trials and comparing and combining the results.

The CASP Project, in recognition that reviews are only as good as the studies they survey, sets guidelines by which to assess their value, and runs workshops on critical appraisal for doctors.

The Cochrane Collaboration and the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination are now making their databases widely available. Their remit is to prepare, maintain and disseminate quality systematic reviews. Their work is of course never ending as new studies are constantly being undertaken. The Cochrane Database on CD-ROM is expected to appear twice per year, while the NHS Centre should be online by this autumn.

Bob Gann described the work of the Help for Health Trust in helping the consumer recognise that the patient has a choice of therapies and is most likely to make an appropriate choice if sufficient information is available to him. A survey on Community Health information services identified that consumers' enquiries were regularly answered verbally only and that little recourse was made to evidence based medicine.

In view of the complexity of the process of identifying high quality information about clinical effectiveness, the librarian should be aware of his role. He should be aware of the limitations of the data; he should communicate search strategy methods to searchers and he should ensure recognition of the importance of the information expert in identifying relevant evidence.

The world of information and its dissemination is changing rapidly. A conference such as Under One Umbrella is an opportunity for professionals to keep abreast with new methods of information delivery. This is particularly important in the field of health and medicine, where quality information is required in making correct clinical decisions. My own awareness of the exciting advances taking place has been greatly enhanced. Next year's conference of the Library Association Health Libraries Group has the theme 'Evidence based health care. It takes place at the University of Exeter from Friday 6th to Sunday 8th September 1996. I am sure that anyone attending will find the programme at Exeter illuminating, enjoyable and thoroughly worthwhile.

*Janice Grant*  
*South Ayrshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust*

## People

Anne Boyle from the Forth Valley College of Nursing is now librarian at the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh.

Jan Howden is now with the Glasgow Caledonian University Library and Sheila Cunningham has taken up the position of Librarian at Glasgow Eastern College of Nursing.

James Beaton, formerly at the Southern General Hospital, is now librarian at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Charlotte Boulnois has left the Royal Alexandra, Paisley to take up the position at the Southern General.

Elma MacDonald has retired from Monklands.

Anne Brice has left Borders Health Science Library to a new position as Library Information Manager, Health Information Unit, Institute of Health Sciences, University of Oxford.

Anne was ASHSL's secretary over twice was also a very active committee member. The ASHSL committee wish to thank her for her hard work, most importantly for her valuable work on behalf of ASHSL as a member of the NHS Regional Librarian's Group bringing the Scottish experience to the attention of our English colleagues, as well as informing us of good practice in England.

She has been an enthusiastic and hard-working member of the committee and has enlivened meetings.

Anne is settling into her new job finding it very busy but very enjoyable. She says everyone down there has a very high regard for the Scottish Health Service!

*Sheila Cannell*

## Union List

### From the Department of Trivial Gripes

#### Gripe 1

On unnecessary compliments slips sent with ASHSL requests

Your colleague who's based at Stobhill  
Finds it an absolute pill  
Picking compliment slips  
And their neat paper clips  
Off blue ASHSL forms if you will!

If every ASHSL library receives say 4 of these per week, the average three seconds to bin each one amounts to 42,432 seconds per year, i.e. 11.78 hours. These 14,444 slips could be one medium-sized branch of a tree. Is this worth the extra paper clips obtained?

#### Gripe 2

On address labels which require approximately 4 inches of the supplying library's Sellotape.

To preserve one's last whole fingemal  
May easy-peel labels prevail.  
With intransigent backing  
All patience is lacking  
- Spare a thought when preparing to mail!

On libraries who forget to enter their own library code on the blue form. This gripe is on behalf of Michael Wells, who is doing a detailed analysis of comings and goings of ASHSL request when the blue forms are returned to him.

As well as gummed label for mail  
Please remember to add, without fail  
Your own library code  
So that Michael can load  
All the ASHSL stats in detail

## Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

James Beaton is keen to maintain links with ASHSL and the Library of the Royal College Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow has joined the Union List scheme (coded GG/RCPS). All participating libraries should have received a copy of the holdings list from GG/RCPS.

Hazel Williamson  
Medical Librarian  
Glasgow Royal Infirmary  
University NHS Trust  
8-16 Alexandra Parade  
GLASGOW  
G31 2ER

## Other Associations

### ASSIST: The Professional Association for Information Management and Technology Staff in the NHS

ASSIST aims to provide a national organisation for those involved in all areas of information management and technology as a profession within health care. ASSIST already has approximately 1400 members in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The Association brings together the wide range of personnel who work with information in the health service, providing a network to exchange information, good practice and address topical issues. Advice and opportunities for training, education and development are provided and a professional award scheme is being established, which will result in a qualification jointly awarded by ASSIST and the Open University which will be academically recognised by the wider University community. Professional standards of behaviour for IM&T are also being developed and a Code of Practice and Conduct are currently in draft.

To be truly national however, ASSIST needs to be established in Scotland. There has been lots of interest from Scotland but few enquiries make it to membership; this is set to change however. A meeting will be held on Thursday 28th September at 7.30 at the Scottish Health Service Centre, Western General Hospital, Crewe Road, Edinburgh, to launch officially the organisation in Scotland. All ASHSL members are invited to attend, to join ASSIST as a companion organisation (£25 annually) and are urged to inform all relevant personnel within their areas of influence about this important initiative. Contact Amanda Richardson at Borders Health Board, on 01896 822265 for more details.

## Witch Video?

We have recently incorporated a commercially produced 9 minute video into our user education sessions with favourable results.

"Using the Health Care library"\* is a light-hearted introduction to the services on offer from nursing and other health care libraries.

This amusing video opens with the scene of the sick witch in her hospital bed, with her plate of batwing soup untouched. At the case conference called to discuss her condition, it becomes apparent that the hospital team have a real problem on their hands.

~ she has turned the consultant into a prince

~ her x-rays and scans are all blank

~ the business manager announces that the hospital is liable to pay damages to the nurse who tried to take a blood sample!

In order to determine her condition and its treatment, the whole team decide to visit the local health care library and use all its search tools and resources to track down the necessary information.

The video follows the team around the library, as they use books, journals and audio-visual material. It explains about microfiche and computer catalogues and both online and CD-ROM databases, as well as the more traditional printed indexes and abstracting tools.

Important messages for library customers are also given:

*"the library is a co-operative service; you need to help the librarian and other library users"*

*"the staff are trained professionals and are there to help you"*

*"using the library gets easier with practice"*

Finally, the case conference is reconvened and they all share the information they have found, which reveals that Miss Hexley is suffering from "sick witch syndrome" and can be treated successfully.

The video ends with the consultant on his ward rounds visiting the witch, who is now sitting up in bed, reading a magazine on the supernatural and eating a box of "Black Magic" chocolates. She promptly turns him into a large green frog, much to the delight of the nursing staff, who declare she is obviously now cured!

\* Using the Health Care Library is available, priced £35.00, from Teaching Support and Media Services, South Academic Block, Southampton General Hospital, Tremona Road, Southampton, SO9 4XY Tel 01703 796563

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# ASHSL

Association of Scottish Health Sciences Librarians