Mini-profile:

a day in the life of an electronic resources librarian

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The joy of e-mail

Nursing a mug of hot, sweet Assam, I open Outlook. It's the usual mix: adverts, spam, CPD notices, meeting arrangements and journal queries from mystified users.

Originally part of Exeter University, our library joined the NHS in 2002–2003. Now part of the Royal Devon & Exeter hospital (which sometimes surprises the hospital), we also support staff and students of the Peninsula School of Medicine and Dentistry (PCMD). As a collaboration between Exeter University, Plymouth University, and the NHS, PCMD has no single-site dedicated academic library. Over 12,000 NHS users and about 400 local PCMD users can join our library.

We benefit from a huge range of excellent resources, but with many variables. Are users NHS, dual status, or medical school only? If medical school, which university resources do they want? (We refer them as appropriate.) What network are they using? Which university password? Are they using a VPN? If wanting NHS resources, were they looking at university resources first? In the real world, it would be obvious they were using separate libraries. On the Internet, boundaries are hazier.

A GP needs an article for a journal club. I consult our combined A-Z journals list. I talk him through NHS Athens access. He's grateful, but still mystified.

Having flagged e-mails requiring action, I close Outlook. King's College strongly suggests constant e-mail interruptions are not beneficial[1]. For about a week, I've been checking my e-mail two or three times daily: it's definitely less distracting.

A hospital consultant urgently needs two articles about vitamin K deficiency in babies. She's checked our list: we should have one journal, but the password she's had for three months isn't working. I confirm we still subscribe and e-mail our journal agent. Having checked the British Library's BL Direct, we obtain the item via SED, paying extra for the two-hour express service. I try not to fret about the online access we've already paid for.

The second article is e-pub only. The publisher's licence means that the British Library can't supply; nor is it available direct from the website. Even if it were, few NHS departments have corporate credit cards. *We're* no exception. The only solution is a full subscription: over £1,000. One article would consume about 1/20th of our annual journals budget – and it still wouldn't be here in time. I telephone the doctor, who asks if there are any similar articles.

Literature searching and evidence-based practice

I log in to the National Library for Health via NHS Athens. In 2007 NHS England began creating Search 2.0, an interface to MEDLINE, CINAHL and other clinical databases: users would no longer need to learn new systems every three years. Since summer 2008 Search 2.0 is the official recommended literature search option. I search twice, with different results both times. The third time, the system crashes. It's reminiscent of my first health post in 2001: a defence establishment where Internet provision was via dial-up modem. I reluctantly resort to PubMed and Google Scholar, identifying relevant articles within seconds, downloading the citations into Endnote for easy reformatting.

The joy of journals

I check for full-text availability. NHS England subscribes to a small collection of high-impact online journals, mainly *British Medical Journal* and *American Medical Association*. Previously, aggregated collections were available nationally: it isn't financially possible to have both. The south west still subscribes to some aggregated collections, although content coverage is erratic. Some 'one-year' embargos mean January 2006 content is actually available in December 2007. Overall, however, it's cost-effective.

Online journal access via publisher websites isn't straightforward either: archives in particular are problematic. Some publishers are incredulous that IP address recognition is not suitable. Few UK hospitals have VPNs. From outside the NHS, NHS England computers appear to use one IP range, even though hospitals have different physical addresses.

I usually attempt to explain this every few months to some baffled new employee on a publisher's help desk in a country where Athens isn't used, often using the analogy of the 'Big Four' accounting firms: geographically diverse, all using one computer network. My standard e-mail for new journal subscriptions now asks publishers to confirm they are happy for all other NHS England locations to see our journals. If they confirm this, I'm happy to use IP addresses to set up our online journal access.

Keeping it up to date: journals lists and catalogues

A journal listing needs updating. I amend the records on Innovative Millennium, the University LMS; our A to Z list; and Olib, the shared NHS south west catalogue. A Z39.50 link between the catalogues is under investigation, but currently unfeasible.

A library user wants the *Oxford Handbook of Palliative Care* online. The university also has some MyiLibrary titles, using IP recognition. Using an Exeter University computer, the book appears unavailable. I demonstrate the solution: close the Internet browser down completely, reopen it, and log back in with NHS Athens.

Induction and instruction

At lunchtime half a dozen nurses join. They find electronic resources pointless: they want to heal people, not ogle computers. Two aren't sure where the shift and enter/return keys are. I emphasize we can find information for them.

More e-mails to answer: will we be running our 'special study unit' in finding information for medical students this year? Our paediatrics ward requests a short presentation on online journals at their staff meeting.

Weaving the web(sites)

Our mental health and nursing librarian sends a new books list. I update our external website via Dreamweaver and FTP, then use the in-house content management system to update our Intranet pages. A new system is due 'imminently'.

At the end of the day I check my e-mail again. I've had a reply to my query about the password to the journal our consultant was trying to access earlier: apparently, we changed it. I check my sent e-mail box and archives, which go back 18 months, and remain mystified. The publisher appears to have changed the password three times this year without notifying us. I set a reminder to myself to check it once a month just in case it gets changed again. Our Athens administrator has sent statistics for the previous month. Sadly, our two most used resources in the south west (the previous medical databases supplier and the aggregated journals) were cancelled by the National Library for Health.

A departing customer calls in to say 'thank you'. They're off to North Devon for their next rotation. We reassure them they can still access online journals, and that the library staff there, like ourselves, are 'not the shushing type'.

1. Wainwright, M. (2005), Emails 'pose threat to IQ', *The Guardian*, Friday April 22 2005, http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2005/apr/22/money.workandcareers (Accessed 16 September 2008)