

The pilot NeLH: progress and developments

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Introduction

Three years ago, Information for Health <<http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexipu/strategy/index.htm>> set in motion the development of the National electronic Library for Health (NeLH). Commissioned by the NHS Executive Information Policy Unit, the NHS Information Authority <<http://www.nhsia.nhs.uk>> was given the task of delivering the NeLH. This article outlines the achievements of the NeLH programme to date and the work in progress.

The ultimate goal of the NeLH is to provide clinicians, patients and the public with easy access to accredited information when they need it, as reflected in the programme's mission statement:

'... to improve health and healthcare, clinical practice, patient choice and patient influence on the NHS by providing easy access to best current knowledge and information'

A key area is to provide information support for national priorities and programmes, such as the National Service Frameworks. An example of such work can be seen in the Coronary Heart Disease Zone <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/heart/>>, which e.g. provides links to information on Rapid Action Chest Pain Clinics.

Development of the pilot NeLH

The programme has adopted a prototyping approach, which involves assessing user requirements, testing a product, canvassing feedback and refining the product to better meet users' needs. A large consultation exercise was undertaken early on in the programme; this was achieved through meetings, colloquia and online discussion, involving individuals and organisations both within and outside the NHS.

The pilot NeLH <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk>> was launched late last

Table 1 Virtual branch libraries, July 2001

Cancer	Communicable diseases
Diabetes	Diagnostics
Health informatics	Health management
Heart diseases	Knowledge management
Learning disabilities	Lung disease
Mental health	Primary care
Public health	Rare diseases
Screening	

year (2000). Some building blocks were already apparent, resulting from DoH and NHS funded research activities and programmes. The pilot site brings together existing resources, e.g. the NHS Health Technology Assessment programme, with new services and resources, such as the NeLH Guidelines Database. The NeLH External Reference Group provides an independent editorial function. Managed by the R&D Directorate of the DoH, this Group has determined a hierarchy of resources considered to be essential to health care practice. This hierarchy is headed up by NICE approved clinical guidelines and appraisals, and goes on to include overviews of evidence, full systematic reviews, limited systematic reviews, findings from single studies and decision support systems. The hierarchy differs a little from others used in evidence-based practice as the clear aim of the NeLH is to provide rapid access to summaries of evidence with links to supporting full text, where available and appropriate.

In addition to the main NeLH site, entry points to NeLH resources are provided via virtual branch libraries and professional portals.

Virtual branch libraries (VBLs)

One of the functions of the NeLH is to create and sustain communities. The VBLs are instrumental in achieving this by bringing together health professionals working in specialities or on specific health issues. All VBLs (listed in Table 1) can be accessed from the NeLH site although they are currently at different stages of

development. The VBLs are very much aimed at a multidisciplinary audience and focus on specific health problems or patient groups.

The objectives of the VBLs are:

- To identify any additions to the knowledge platform
- To give advice to the NeLH team about ways in which know-how, knowledge and patient information can be integrated
- To ensure the patient voice is clearly heard in the development of the NeLH
- To ensure the needs of primary care are taken into account
- To identify the questions commonly asked about the disease and ensure that answers which cut across all parts of the NeLH are prepared
- To promote informatics in the constituency
- To identify relevant developments in the electronic patient record and in information and communication technology and advise on ways in which the NeLH could be integrated with such developments

Professional portals

Professional portals act as gateways to the NeLH, serving the information needs of specific professional groups, who have previously experienced limited access to traditional library resources due to a lack of funding. The first of this series of portals, for speech and language therapists, was

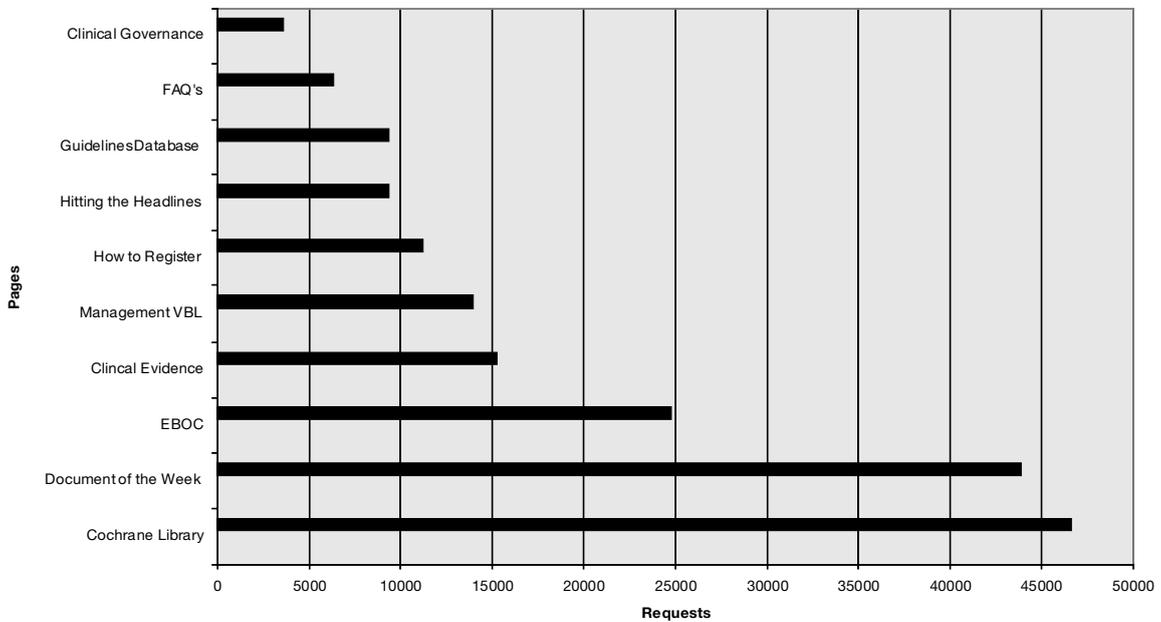


Fig. 1 Top ten NeLH resources, January–June 2001

announced in April 2001. Further portals will be launched throughout the year for other professions, such as nurses, psychologists and physiotherapists.

The professional portals aim to:

- Provide a clearly identifiable uniprofessional entry point for users
- Support smaller therapy professions that are difficult to support by non-electronic means
- Enable rapid access to electronic resources by time-poor professionals, sometimes with lower than average ICT skills
- Focus on the development of knowledge skills in specific professions with links to national initiatives including best practice
- Facilitate links between the NeLH and relevant developments in a specific profession
- Collect the majority of high quality electronic resources available
- Work in partnership with professional bodies and academic organisations to assist in knowledge acquisition, sharing, distribution and development

Reactions to the NeLH

The NeLH experienced a surge in usage in April 2001, shortly after the major content was first made available. The decline since April could perhaps

be explained by the two bank holidays in May and the fact that we are now entering the holiday season. A publicity campaign is planned and usage statistics will be used to target particular groups and to highlight specific resources. Figure 1 indicates the Top Ten resources visited during January to June 2001.

User requirements

There has been extensive communication with the user community during the development of the pilot NeLH. During the course of the pilot, this has increased and through the NeLH User Advisory Council, a panel of over 200 users is being assembled to further enable this work.

A number of colloquia have been held throughout the programme to assess user requirements, focusing on specific topics such as musculoskeletal disease; types of care such as palliative care; and the needs of single professional groups. On the basis of these colloquia, user requirements for the full NeLH have been identified as follows:

- A one-stop shop, single source of knowledge
- 24/7 access
- High-speed access
- Integration with the electronic patient record system
- A single search function
- Localisation of NeLH content

- Close working with traditional services and sources

- Access to a common knowledge core

The pilot NeLH is working towards these goals and is focusing on providing easy access to the best available knowledge. Usability and accessibility are accorded high priority. The entire site has been 'Bobby approved' and constructed according to the RNIB and DoH guidelines to avoid excluding disabled users. Navigation of the site is being monitored and user feedback has provided some indication of difficulties encountered by users. For example, several complaints have been made about the lack of a search engine; in response, the NeLH team is investigating the options available.

The NeLH and health libraries

It is obvious from communication with the health community that NHS staff value their local library services and the NeLH aims to complement these services. By working with librarians, the NeLH will develop into a service which enhances and integrates with existing services.

Given the huge change underway in NHS libraries, the NeLH is in an ideal position to support librarians in these new roles, most notably through the NeLH Librarian Development Programme. Further, in response to

feedback from the library community, a professional portal for health librarians and information professionals is being developed in partnership with the NHS Regional Librarians Group <<http://www.nthames-health.tpmde.ac.uk/htr/rlg/>> and the Library Association's Health Libraries Group <<http://www.la-hq.org.uk/groups/hlg/hlg.html>>.

Evaluation

During the summer of 2001, independent evaluations of the pilot NeLH will be conducted by the University of Wales at Aberystwyth (UWA) and the National Computing Centre (NCC). Both will consider the strategic context and the clinical and qualitative benefits of NeLH. A cost-benefit study will also be undertaken as part of the evaluation exercise. It is anticipated that the evaluations will be completed by September 2001.

Coming soon

This article is intended to provide an update of the work undertaken on the NeLH since Ben Toth's last article in this journal.¹ *He@lth Information on the Internet* plans to run NeLH features in future issues, to alert readers to new services, features and resources. Highlights for the future include:

- The NeLH search engine
- Programme evaluation
- The NeLH Pathways Database
- A trial of the British Library's zetoc service

References

1. Toth B. The National Electronic Library for Health: the story so far. *He@lth Information on the Internet* 1999; 9: 9-11 <<http://www.hioti.org>>

News item

He@lth Information on the Internet has been in the news!

EAHIL, *Newsletter to European Health Librarians*, May 2001, No. 55, states that it 'is a well-written and compact newsletter for people with limited time'. <<http://www.eahil.org>>



View from the front line: my top 5 sites

Dr Harry Brown

NHS General Practitioner and author of the *BMJ's* Netlines column

In this article, I shall look at my favourite Web sites. To keep life simple, I shall restrict it to 5 sites. Just to prove there is more to online life than just the medical world, I shall look at one purely non-medical site.

<<http://www.bmj.com>>

Most of you will recognise this address as the site of the *British Medical Journal*. This contains the full text of its contents going back to the beginning of 1994. Everything is here in full text, it is free to access as many times as you like and there is no registration process. In fact there is no catch. This is a fantastic repository of medical knowledge that is easily accessible. The text is fully (and relatively quickly) searchable and is probably the Web resource that I most frequently use in conjunction with my day-to-day work. Though I receive the paper journal, there is nothing to beat an electronic search through past issues looking for a particular topic. Some other prestigious medical journals' Web sites have access restricted to subscribers. So this freely accessible easy-to-use resource is a blessing to the Internet community. It is one of the few Internet resources that if necessary I would be prepared to pay for.

<<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>>

The PubMed version of Medline is another well-known and highly respected Internet resource that for many of us needs no introduction. However, for those that don't know, it is a freely available version of a very popular medical database which collects descriptions and citations of articles published in medical journals. Being able to easily search on a topic within the medical literature is a fantastic resource. Even better, searches usually run very quickly.

<<http://www.pubcrawler.ie/>>

This clever use of the PubMed database and GenBank (the US National Institutes of Health genetic sequence database) always amazes me. Basically a user sets up a query or a topic (which is run regularly against these databases)

and then receives email notification of new additions on that topic. My search word is 'Internet' and most days of the working week, I receive an email about new articles. From that email I log on to my personalised Web page and view the citations of the articles that have just appeared. Sometimes the article of interest is published in an online version of that journal and using the general search engine Google <<http://www.google.com>> I can locate the online version of the journal. Occasionally no text is available, or it is just the abstract. Sometimes the full text is freely available. Again this service is free and incredibly useful. The search results are sent to me without any effort on my part and I can view the data at my own convenience.

<<http://www.newsrounds.com/>>

This is a brilliant medical news-gathering site that draws on a large number of useful sources. There is an initial but easy registration process which helps the user to customise the site so that the data gathered are relevant to their needs. A quick scan of the page is all that is needed and anything of interest can simply be clicked on and you are taken to that story. It is that simple and yet it is that simplicity which makes this site so attractive. The stories are regularly changed and so this page could become an ideal home page.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>>

The BBC online version enhances the already high stature of the BBC. This is the news section and if you are a news junkie like myself then this is the daddy of them all. The stories change all the time, it is very up to date, its subject range is pretty extensive, and the design is simple but very effective. The stories also have extensive links both internally and externally and there is access to other services such as video and audio. It is simply superb.

These choices are all free information providers, using data sources from credible authorities and thus represent the best qualities of the Internet. **Please let me know your top 5 sites** – DrHarry@dial.pipex.com.