

Developing electronic information services for members of the Royal College of Nursing

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Description of the process of developing and implementing an Information Strategy for the delivery of electronic library information services for nurses.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) <<http://www.rcn.org.uk>> currently has over 340,000 members, geographically dispersed across the UK and abroad, from a variety of different sectors. In addition to nurses working for the NHS, we have members from the independent and academic sectors, members taking a career break, and retired nurses. One thing our varied membership does have in common is a hunger for information, and the constant need to update their skills and knowledge. Electronic delivery is the only way to provide an equal information service to all members regardless of geographical location.

Developing an Information Strategy

Library and Information Services <http://www.rcn.org.uk/learning/learning_library_information.html> were not able to achieve this ambitious agenda on their own. We decided to harness the enormous range of expertise within the RCN, and to put our skills in knowledge management into practice. Library and Information Services led a diverse group of colleagues from areas such as IT, Web, marketing and distance learning who were connected by their desire to meet the information needs of RCN members. This wide-ranging group of colleagues from across the UK, led by the Head of Library and Information Services, decided to develop an Information Strategy for the RCN.

In 1999, focus groups took place across the UK with a wide range of nurses. Information specialists

entered into a dialogue with users to find out their information needs, and what they perceived as current barriers. These are examples of what RCN members said they needed:

- Quality information speedily and accessible via PCs
- Remote, fast access to information via systems which are easy to use
- Full-text, relevant information
- Information that is relevant, timely, paper-free
- Training in looking for information
- Specialist, as well as generic, nursing information

Other issues included information overload and physical barriers to accessing information. One nurse said to us: 'We're desperate: we need information to do our work'.

We analysed all the feedback that we received. Several themes were consistent –members were asking for information which they could rely on, which was accessible wherever and whenever it was convenient for them, and preferably available in full-text.

From the information that we gathered, we developed nine strategic objectives under the overall aim of anticipating and responding to the information needs of all our users wherever and whenever:

- Creating knowledge management in the RCN
- Creating access to information whenever and wherever
- Creating access to quality information on the Web
- Creating an effective physical learning environment for the RCN Library and Information Services

- Actively promoting information literacy and the use of information for clinical effectiveness
- Creating effective information provision for subject specialisms within nursing
- Working collaboratively with external information providers, policy-makers and relevant organisations
- Streamlining and targeting information
- Quality assuring customer care

We then consulted widely with our members on the resulting strategy, and made it freely available on the Web. More feedback on the Information Strategy was received than on any other RCN consultation document, particularly from members working abroad.

Implementing the Information Strategy

In 2000-2001, we embarked on our first phase of implementing the strategy. We focused on quality information on the Web, access to a range of full-text information, and improving the physical learning environment for users.

NMAP

An RCN member, also a lecturer at Sheffield University, had read the Information Strategy and contacted the RCN regarding a potential project to develop a gateway to quality assured nursing resources on the Web that he believed to be directly in line with our strategic objectives. As a result, the RCN with the Universities of Nottingham and Sheffield put in a funding bid to the

Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) which proved successful. The resulting gateway, NMAP (nursing midwifery and allied health professionals) <<http://nmap.ac.uk>>, became the new

streamline the system. The RCN will shortly be evaluating the project with feedback from users.

In May 2001, the newly re-designed RCN library in London was opened, with over 50% more space than pre-

electronic portfolio that will be available to RCN members only, free at the point of use.

RCN members voted in an historic subscription increase to pay for new services

nursing and allied health subject portal of OMNI, part of the BIOME service. The gateway indexes resources using the RCN library thesaurus in addition to Mesh2000 headings, which were not entirely appropriate to UK nursing.

Access to full-text electronic journals and other e-services

RCN members at the AGM in 2000 voted in an historic subscription increase to pay for new services, and near the top of the list was remote access to full-text electronic information. This enabled us to move forward with implementing our e-strategy. Working with commercial partners, Health Communications Network and Blackwell Publishing, and with our partners in British Nursing Index (BNI), we launched a pilot project. This facilitated remote access by all RCN members to the nursing bibliographic database BNI <<http://www.bnipus.co.uk>> (produced by the RCN, Bournemouth University and Poole and Salisbury NHS Trusts) and a range of full-text journals. The initiative is for private and personal use and free at the point of use. By means of Silverplatter's Silverlinker system, members can link from BNI to a range of Blackwell Publishing's full-text journals. The journals, including the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, *Journal of Clinical Nursing* and the *Journal of Nursing Management*, can also be searched separately. Over 12,000 members had registered to use the service by March 2001, with an activation rate of 20%. The system is simple to use – essential with a remote service. Currently, each member has to be registered separately and given a password. We are hoping that the launch of the RCN extranet will help

viously, with state-of-the-art IT equipment, and an IT training suite. RCN Library and Information Services have also set up about 20 resource centres to date across the UK in collaboration with other organisations to increase nurses' access to PCs and the Internet.

Other initiatives include the Care Pathways Database <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/carepathways.asp>> developed by the RCN and the National electronic Library for Health. The use of care pathways by nurses and other health professionals is increasingly being seen as a key NHS resource for implementing National Service Frameworks and the modernisation objectives of the NHS Plan.

All new e-services were extensively promoted to RCN members. A video, *Join the e-revolution*, was produced and then shown at RCN Congress and a wide range of other nursing conferences. The video, which aimed to highlight new online information products and promote use of the Internet among nurses, won Highly Commended in the Library Association's PR and Publicity Awards Multi-media and Web Page publicity category in 2001.

Future electronic services

RCN learning zone and information literacy area

At RCN Congress in April 2002, we will be launching the second phase of products from the implementation plan of the Information Strategy. This includes an information literacy area, which is a key part of the new RCN Learning Zone (which will be available on the RCN extranet section of the Web site). The RCN Learning Zone will be offering a range of learning opportunities, fully integrated with information resources, and including an

RCN Mental Health Zone

RCN members also said that they would like the RCN Library and Information Services to make more specialist information available. As the first stage, we are launching the RCN Mental Health Zone at Congress. RCN Library and Information Services have developed the Mental Health Zone with members and the RCN Mental Health Adviser. It includes a virtual resource centre, and areas for policy, events, good practice, regional update, news and a discussion section.

Libraries for nurses

Another new service to be launched in April 2002 is the 'Libraries for Nurses' Web page <<http://www.nursing-libraries.org>> which is a searchable online map of library services available to nurses throughout the UK. The RCN Wales library initially developed this site.

Conclusions

Our future e-strategy for the RCN includes increasing the range of electronic journals available for RCN members, and including e-books and e-chapters. We are also developing the range of specialist portals available. The next specialist zone will be the care of children and young people.

Developing and implementing an Information Strategy is a continuous process. When the Information Strategy Steering Group is satisfied that the initial phase of the e-strategy has been successfully implemented, the next phase, based on consultation with members and new focus groups, will begin.

References [Accessed 15/04/02]

- Royal College of Nursing. Information Strategy. London: RCN, 1999. Full-text on <http://www.rcn.org.uk/professional/strategy_documents/strategy_documents.html>
- Royal College of Nursing. Join the e-revolution [video]. London: RCN 2001. Copies of this video are available free of charge from the RCN Library and Information Service.