

NeLH: The Good, The Bad and The Not Evident

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A summary of feedback from workshop delegates on the content and design of NeLH.

In March 2003, NeLH held a study day for NHS library staff <http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/librarian/networking_conf.asp>. A further programme of events for health librarians within England will run from May to September 2003 <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/librarian>>.

This article focuses on the feedback from a key workshop of the study day. 'Designing the new NeLH', was a brainstorming session to generate ideas about the look and feel of NeLH. The workshop was led by health librarians (John Loy, Richard Marriott, Caroline Papi and Naomi Rousseau), all expert in online sources and using NeLH, but independent of NeLH.

Delegates were asked to brainstorm 'The Good, The Bad and The Not Evident', i.e. identifying the aspects of NeLH which work well, those which don't work and features they would like to see which aren't immediately apparent. They were then asked to prioritise any changes they would like to see.

The Good

There were many positive comments on the content of NeLH. It is regarded as a reliable and quality resource specific to the NHS. Delegates felt their users appreciated the one-stop shop aspect. However, many delegates felt the valuable content is hidden from users by the rather crowded home page. One of the principles of the original design was to serve users with the knowledge they need, in as few clicks as possible. The site is deliberately shallow to help users to access information quickly. The downside is that the home page features many links. Many of our expert users feel this serves to hide key

resources from users, who, overwhelmed by the sheer wealth of resources available, may opt for the 'wrong' resource, one which is not best suited to answer their question. Delegates felt that the core knowledge and know-how resources should be made more prominent – in particular, the Cochrane Library should be very obvious. Getting this right was considered a high priority. They also wanted the Specialist Libraries to appear more prominently on the home page. The home page often requires scrolling and, on some screens, users have to scroll before they even see the menu of Specialist Libraries. This was also accorded high priority.

The Bad

One of the main concerns was that the home page is daunting for new users. Delegates felt it was too cluttered and the language used was unhelpful, e.g. what is the difference between knowledge and know-how, between virtual branch libraries and professional portals? It was felt that most new users would be unfamiliar with the resources available via NeLH so needed some help. These points were accorded high priority. Delegates also suggested improvements to the interfaces of specific resources, feeling that they are currently user-unfriendly. It was suggested that some of the key resources needed work, e.g. the Reference section, which is quite basic, and the professional portals, which were felt to be too low-key. Many other comments related to the positioning of links on the home page – some of the major resources should be accorded more prominence to stand out to users. This echoed comments made when delegates were asked to highlight 'The Good' and 'The Not Evident', so this is clearly an area

of concern for librarians.

The Not Evident

Delegates put forward a range of ideas to improve the navigation, usability and look and feel of NeLH. In particular, delegates felt users needed more help with: Athens registration to use password-protected NeLH resources at home; determining which resources to use when searching. One suggestion was to include mouse-over text to describe individual resources. It was also felt that more training could be offered, via links to online training packages and local libraries and trainers. Delegates suggested directing new users to the NeLH tour. Several comments related to customisation and personalisation. The overcrowding of the home page was also noted. Delegates suggested there should be more white space on the page. Other comments related to content: a suggestions' mechanism for new links; collaborative working with Google to facilitate better searching; more partnership working with the Department of Health to develop a resource directory of publications; guides to using reference management software with NeLH resources. Communication was also considered to be vital and delegates wished to see an electronic user group involving the wider user community, with the facility to offer e-mail updates. The first steps towards this are the monthly 'Update' newsletter <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/update>> and the discussion list <<http://www.mailbase.org.uk/lists/nelh>>.

Action

Feedback from the workshop is being analysed and will be used in a re-launch of NeLH in Autumn 2003.