He@lth Information on the Internet

Meeting the information needs of risk managers and clinical governance leads

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The nature and scope of risk management is closely tied in with the field of clinical governance. The NHS created posts for risk managers in response to a growing awareness of the public health problems posed by adverse events and medical error in health.

Risk management has been defined as:

the systematic process of identifying, evaluating and addressing potential and actual risk, through a well designed programme that prevents, controls and minimises risk exposure

Wisdom Centre Website
<www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/ wrp/cgcrm.htm>

Risk managers are a relatively new professional group in the NHS. These posts were created as a result of growing awareness of the public health problems posed by adverse events and medical error in health. The 1998 survey of Walshe and Dineen[1] found that nearly all English secondary care trusts had a nominated board member responsible for risk management and 85% had appointed a clinical risk manager, but most of those in post had other commitments (*e.g.* claims management or health and safety). Most of these clinical risk managers had a clinical background, but only 11% had a formal qualification in risk handling. There were very limited opportunities for training, and a third received none. A base line survey of risk managers carried out by the Centre for Health Leadership <www.chl.wales.nhs.uk/pubs/ riskmanagers.pdf> found that the majority of risk managers had a nursing background and had entered risk management as a planned career change. Nearly half the sample worked within a risk management team, which typically included health and safety managers, claims managers, fire officers and corporate services directors.

The nature and scope of risk management is closely tied in with the field of clinical governance.

Clinical governance is concerned with consistent improvement in the quality of clinical care across whole organisations. There is, therefore, an increasing acceptance that management of clinical risk at an organisational level is an important aspect of clinical governance. Clinical risk management recognises that risk can arise at many points in a patient's journey, and that aspects of how organisations are managed can systematically influence the degree of risk.

NHS Scotland Website
<www.show.scot.nhs.uk/isdonline/ clinical_gov/risk_management/ risk_management.htm>

The information needs of risk managers and clinical governance leads

Given the newness of these two professional groups, it is not surprising to find a dearth of empirical studies documenting their information needs (compared, say, to the literature on the information needs of clinicians). However, from discussions with risk managers and clinical governance leads who have signed up for a specialist option module (Key Information Sources for Risk Manager) taught at University College London as part of a graduate programme in risk management, it is clear that those working in these fields have quite broad and varied information needs.

There are both generic needs (*e.g.* keeping up with legislation and policy directives) and specialist needs, in relation to clinical areas such as mental health, child health or women's health. Students taking the module are asked to articulate their own information needs and to identify and review information sources which they regard as valuable resources in their professional role.

Risk managers' perceptions of their information needs

To keep their knowledge base up-to-date, risk managers must be aware of:

- *Developments in clinical practice (including guidelines, protocols of care, national service frameworks).*
- *Changes in statutes, legislation and government policy.*
- *Best practice in relation to monitoring adverse incidents and implementing change.*
- *The latest thinking in management theory and practice.*
- *Relevant research methods (e.g. root cause analysis, clinical risk profiling) and findings.*

Highly valued Web sites

Risk managers view the Internet as one of their prime information sources. The following list of Web sites has been reviewed by the risk managers and clinical governance leads on the module and ranked very highly. Anyone new to the field may want to bookmark these sites.

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Governmental organisations

Clinical Governance Support Team (CGST)
The CGST is part of the NHS Modernisation Agency. The site contains an online Forum.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
Britain's Health and Safety Commission (HSC) and the HSE 'are responsible for the regulation of almost all the risks to health and safety arising from work activity in Britain'. Their 'mission is to protect people's health and safety by ensuring risks in the changing workplace are properly controlled'. The HSE's remit includes hospitals.

Healthcare Commission
'The Healthcare Commission is the independent inspection body for both the NHS and private and voluntary healthcare.' It 'exists to promote improvement in the quality of health care in England and Wales'.

Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) merged with the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) in 2003 to form the MHRA. The MHRA's role is 'protecting and promoting public health and patient safety by ensuring that medicines, healthcare products and medical equipment meet appropriate standards of safety, quality, performance and effectiveness, and are used safely'.

National Clinical Assessment Agency (NCAA)
The NCAA 'is a special health authority established as one of the central elements of the NHS's work on quality. It...aims to provide a support service to health authorities, primary care trusts and hospital and community trusts who are faced with concerns over the performance of an individual doctor. [It]...also provides support to the employers of hospital and community dentists about whom there are performance concerns.'

National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE)
NICE 'is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on treatments and care for people using the NHS in England and Wales'. Its 'guidance is intended for healthcare professionals, patients and their carers to help them make decisions about treatment and health-care. NICE guidance is developed using the expertise of the NHS and wider healthcare community including NHS staff, healthcare professionals, patients and carers, industry and the academic community'.

National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA)
<http://81.144.177.110/>
The NPSA is a Special Health Authority which co-ordinates the reporting of, and learning from, adverse incidents occurring in the NHS. The Agency was set up in response to the recommendations made in *An Organisation with a Memory*.

NHS Litigation Authority (NHSLA)
The NHSLA is a Special Health Authority. It indemnifies 'NHS bodies in respect of both clinical negligence and non-clinical risks and manages claims and litigation under both headings'. The authority has 'risk management programmes in place against which NHS trusts are assessed'.

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
'The Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Health Service Ombudsman undertake independent investigations into complaints about government departments, a range of other public bodies, and the NHS. The Health Service Ombudsman investigates complaints that a hardship or injustice has been caused by the NHS's failure to provide a service, by a failure in service, or by maladministration.'

Public Sector Benchmarking Service (PSBS)
<www.benchmarking.gov.uk/default1.asp>
The PSBS is 'a partnership between the Cabinet Office and HM Customs & Excise with the key aim of promoting effective benchmarking and sharing good practices across the public sector'. A section of the site is devoted to risk management. To use all the services, it is necessary to register; registration is free but is restricted to 'public servants'.

Other organisations

Datix
www.datixhealth.com/applications/website.nsf/pages/main?opendocument>
This company sells software for risk management in healthcare. The site hosts e-forums for risk managers.

Medical Defence Union (MDU)
<www.the-mdu.com/gp/index.asp>
'The MDU is a mutual, non-profit organisation, owned by [its]...members – doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals.' It defends its members against charges of incorrect or inappropriate clinical performance. It may also pay compensation to patients for harm caused by medical negligence.

Medical Protection Society (MPS)
<www.medicalprotection.org/medical/united_kingdom/default.aspx>
The MPS is an international, mutual medical protection organisation, helping 'doctors with legal problems that arise from their clinical practice'.

Resources, publications, news, alerts

Bandolier
<www.jr2.ox.ac.uk/bandolier/>
A monthly publication providing evidence-based healthcare information in the UK, for both healthcare professionals and consumers.

BBC
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/default.stm>
There is a section on health news.

BMJ e-journal site
<http://bmj.bmjjournals.com/>
The electronic archives contain a number of topic collections which are relevant to risk managers: ethics, health policy (including organisation of health care), management (including patient safety/clinical risk/medical error). In addition, a number of recent themed issues have been devoted to risk management (*e.g. Balancing benefits and harms in healthcare*, July 2004; *Communicating risks: illusion or truth?* September 2003). Provides topics and news alerting services.

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Clinical Governance Bulletin
<www.rsmpress.co.uk/cgb.htm>
A bi-monthly publication for clinicians and managers working in Trusts, Health Authorities and PCTs which highlights and disseminates best practice. It is funded by the Department of Health, with full text online at <www.clinical-governance.com>. Articles focus on a broad range of issues in health management such as risk management, clinical effectiveness, managing resources, and improving communication.

Department of Health – letters and circulars <www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/LettersAndCirculars/fs/en>
This service provides access to current and obsolete circulars from 1995 to the present, including full text where available.

Department of Health Web site
The site has sections devoted to:
Clinical governance
<www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/ClinicalGovernance/fs/en>
Consent
<www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics Consent/fs/en>
Patient safety
<www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/PatientSafety/fs/en>
Risk research
<www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/RiskResearch/fs/en>

Google <http://news.google.co.uk/news/en/uk/health.html>
There is a section devoted to UK health news. Also provides a news alerting service.

Medical Litigation Online
This online medical law journal is updated daily. There is a database of cases, news, articles. It is necessary to pay a subscription fee to access some of the services.

National Library for Health (NLH)
A useful section is the Health Management Specialist Library. The Quality and Monitoring sub-menu leads to documents which are classified under Quality, Performance Management,

Risk Management, Research Governance, Health and Safety and Confidentiality.

NHS Centre for Reviews & Dissemination (CRD)
<www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/>
The CRD 'aims to provide research-based information about the effects of interventions used in health and social care'. The site provides access to three databases: DARE (Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects), NHS EED (NHS Economic Evaluation Database) and the HTA (Health Technology Assessment) Database.

Reading List on Risk Management
<www.kingsfund.org.uk/pdf/rl_BuildingasaferNHS.pdf>
The King's Fund Library has produced an excellent 15-page reading list called, *Building a safer NHS for patients: risk management/ adverse events* (May 2004). The document also contains a list of recommended Web sites.

The Royal College of Anaesthetists
<www.rcoa.ac.uk/index.asp?PageID=66>
The site contains a listing of 'Hazard Warnings and Medical Device Alerts'.

Safety Alert Broadcast System (SABS)
<www.info.doh.gov.uk/sar/cmopatie.nsf/>
The SABS is a new electronic system developed by the UK Department of Health, with the MHRA, NHS Estates and the NPSA. 'From 26 April 2004, specific types of safety alerts will be emailed to nominated leads in Trust and PCTs, who will be asked to disseminate the message to those who need to take action. This role will be similar to the current MHRA device liaison officer role, but with the additional responsibility of providing feedback on action to implement the alert using a simple electronic form. Nominated leads in Trusts and PCTs can find more detail about receiving alerts and using the new system by logging into the SABS Web site. Copies of all new alerts issued using this system are available on the SABS homepage.'
  Non-UK Web sites – There are a number of well-regarded risk management Web sites outside the UK. Given the differences in culture, legislation and the funding of health care, users need, however, to be cautious in seeking to apply international findings in the context of the NHS.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) (USA)
This is the leading US Federal agency for research on health care quality, costs, outcomes, and patient safety.

National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) (USA)
The aim of the NCPS is to reduce and prevent adverse medical events whilst enhancing patient care. Its programme focuses on 'prevention..., applying human factor analysis and the safety research of high reliability organizations (aviation and nuclear power) targeted at identifying and eliminating system vulnerabilities'.

National Patient Safety Foundation (NPSF) (USA)
The NPSF seeks to improve the safety of patients by identifying and creating a core body of knowledge and finding ways to disseminate and apply that knowledge.

Risk Management Foundation (RMF) (USA)
The RMF 'was incorporated by the Harvard medical institutions...as a charitable, medical and educational membership organization'. It focuses on evidence-based risk management. Claims-based research and data are used to provide decision support for health care managers.

World Health Organization (WHO) (International) <www.who.int/en/>
There is a good deal of material on the WHO Web site which is of relevance to risk managers. See, for example, all the topics which refer to safety –
Injection Safety
  <www.who.int/injection_safety/en/>
Vaccine Safety
  <www.who.int/vaccine_safety/en/>
Patient Safety
  <www.who.int/patientsafety/en/>
Blood Transfusion Safety
  <www.who.int/bct/Main_areas_of_work/BTS/BTS.htm>

There is also a section devoted to
Risk Assessment
<www.who.int/topics/risk_assessment/en/>

Reference
1. Walshe K *et al. Clinical risk management: making a difference?* NHS Confederation/ Healthcare Risk Resources International/ Wanbroughs Willey Hargreave Solicitors (1998)

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Open-access publishing: mixed fortunes

The UK Government has rejected the recommendations made by the Commons' Science and Technology Committee in their report *Free for all?*, stating that they are 'not aware that there are major problems in accessing scientific information' and arguing that 'it is not obvious...that the 'author-pays' business model would give better value for money than the current one'. The full response can be found at <www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmsctech/1200/ 120003.htm>

In contrast, the Wellcome Trust, the UK's largest funder of biomedical research, has announced that it will require the researchers it funds to deposit papers in a public archive within 6 months of publication. The Trust is also discussing with the US National Library of Medicine the possibility of establishing a European PubMed Central. Further details can be found at <www.wellcome.ac.uk/node3302.html>.

The US provides a model that the UK could follow. PubMed Central <www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/> is a free digital archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) have recently announced Enhanced Public Access to NIH Research Information <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-04-064.html>. The NIH will require the researchers it funds to provide the NIH with electronic copies of all final version manuscripts upon acceptance for publication. These will be deposited in PubMed Central along with any supplementary information and made freely available 6 months after the manuscript is published.

World Health Day 2005

<www.who.int/world-health-day/2005/en/>

The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that the theme of World Health Day on 7 April 2005 will be healthy mothers and children. The WHO Web site notes that: 'The slogan for World Health Day 2005 is 'Make every mother and child count', which reflects the reality that today, the health of women and children is not a high enough priority for many governments and the international community'.

ICT skills self-assessment toolkit

<www.nhsu.nhs.uk/portal/ page?_pageid=33,69968&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL>

NHS staff can now use a new ICT skills assessment tool. Users link to a Web site and answer a series of questions. The process takes about 40 minutes. The tool helps people to identify gaps in their knowledge and skills, provides a profile of their skills and learning needs based on their job role, and offers a list of relevant learning resources. The tool was developed by the NHSU, soon to become part of the NHS Institute for Learning, Skills and Innovation.