



Library outreach for health professionals

It is not news that New Zealand is facing a problem with retention of general practitioners (GPs) in rural areas. Janes and Dowell¹ report that one area of concern to rural practitioners is the lack of professional support. The role of the medical library is to provide support. How can we get together?

In 2003, the Midcentral District Health Board (DHB) Clinical Library launched its Outreach Service for community and rural health professionals.² The service, which was developed by Library staff and supported by the DHB, was conceived as a way of delivering quality health information and library services to health practitioners in the community.

It was designed to allow easy web access, via the Library Homepage, to a comprehensive range of library services and resources. Registration was made available to all healthcare practitioners who live and/or work in the Midcentral DHB region.

Studies analysing the information needs of rural health professionals have shown a significant diversity in the types of information sought.³ Whilst a need for current clinical information was expected, there was also a need for information covering nursing, health administration, allied health, and social sciences.

To this end, registrants are given desktop access to library databases such as Medline, Psychinfo, MDConsult, and Health Business Elite and as well as online access to a number of major texts including Harrison's Textbook of Medicine, The Merck Manual, Rakel's Textbook of Family Practice, Nelson's Textbook of Pediatrics, and many others. Access is also given to hundreds of full text journals which cover a broad range of topics including general medicine, sports medicine, complementary therapies, allied health, nursing, and general reference.

Library services include literature searches, photocopying, interlibrary loans, lending of books and journals, and the ever-popular Journal Contents Page service. All of these can be accessed via the Internet from office or home.

Rural GP access to, and use of, the Internet for patient care is problematic. Janes et al⁴ report that although approximately 70% of rural GPs have Internet access at work, only a small percentage of them use it more than twice a week for patient care. Access is not enough. Having the knowledge and the skills to efficiently access information is equally important.⁴ The MDHB Clinical Library offers tutorials on navigating the library webpage and in efficient use of the databases it provides.

From 2006, Outreach registrants will be able to enrol for tutorials based at Palmerston North Hospital or alternatively may arrange for Library staff to visit them at their own place of work. For those who do not have Internet access, or who do not want to do their own searching, a phone call to the library is all it takes to have a search done by a qualified librarian.

There is no need for the rural GP or practice nurse to feel disadvantaged through lack of quality information. The Outreach Service is also available to urban GPs as well as

to a wide range of nursing and allied health professionals, midwives, pharmacists, dentists, and Rest Home staff.

Midcentral DHB Clinical Library is the first in New Zealand to offer this complete package free-of-charge to its wider health community. Other DHB libraries are now considering their options.

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