

First Link - Promoting training in knowledge-based information for primary care in Cambridgeshire.

Health staff in the UK are challenged by clinical governance, which requires their clinical decisions to be grounded in evidence-based knowledge. Staff are pressed for time, may be inexperienced in the use of IT, and bewildered as they encounter a multiplicity of web-based information sources.

First Link is a project of Anglia Support Partnership (and formerly of Cambridgeshire Health Authority) to assist primary health care staff in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to access electronic and other sources of information. This group have been targeted because primary care staff are the first to benefit from a national programme to equip services with PCs connected to the national network, NHS-net. The first phase ran from May 2000 to April 2002.

The project has been intended to help users to get best value from the latest developments in knowledge-based information on NHS-net and the Internet, such as the National electronic Library for Health (NeLH) ¹ and its virtual libraries. This supports one of the needs for health professionals as expressed in *Information for Health* ² for “fast, easy access to local and national knowledge bases that support the direct care of patients and clinical management decision making”.

Training modules were developed and piloted with a group of 22 primary health care staff. The modules were

- *Getting on with the Internet*. This was planned to build on to the GPnet Internet Explorer training and to be a general introduction to the tools and resources of the Internet. The topics addressed included significance of domain names, search engines and directories, alerting devices, discussion lists and newsgroups
- *Medical information on the Internet* The module introduced participants to a range of resources to inform their practice, with an emphasis on the resources of the National electronic Library for Health and its virtual branch libraries, and evaluated information via the Biome/Omni portal.
- *Quality Matters* in which participants were encouraged to reflect on the standards of evidence required for the information search in hand and to become their own ‘quality guardians’. They were invited to distinguish between validated information, evidence-based information and evaluated information.

The training programme was evaluated by ALPHA, a local public health training organisation. The evaluation found a noticeable improvement in respondents’ reported abilities to use the Internet and search engines. The specified learning objectives of each module were clearly met. The handouts and introduction to websites were particularly valued and should be developed for future training sessions and the directory should be promoted more heavily to future trainees as a useful resource.

Plans for 2002-3 include a dissemination programme, offering the resources to colleagues for use in training, delivery of the training on a larger scale and development of the directory into a database delivered on the net.

The project website is at www.cambsfirstlink.nhs.uk It includes the project report, containing an extensive literature review and the evaluation; the directory of resources; and the teaching materials used in the sessions. The latter will be rewritten in autumn 2002. Materials are copyright free but please inform us if you plan to use or adapt them.

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Note:

Anglia Support Partnership is a newly formed grouping to deliver support services to primary care trusts and other NHS organisations in Cambridgeshire. First Link is part of the Clinical Governance Directorate.

References:

1. National electronic Library for Health <http://www.nelh.nhs.uk>
2. NHS Executive (1998) *Information for Health: an information strategy for the modern NHS 1998-2005* <http://www.doh.gov.uk/ipu/strategy/index.htm>