

First Link to Information Skills for the Primary Care Sector

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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.

A training programme has been developed and tested to assist staff to identify relevant information from the Internet. Topics have been selected to take users forward from their basic training in use of the browser to finding and evaluating information relevant to their roles. Evaluating the quality of information is a prime consideration. A directory of web resources relevant for local primary care has been developed and materials are available via the project website.

Evaluation has shown a marked improvement in participants' self-assessed ability to use the Internet, a significant improvement in the use of the Internet to find information and a clear change in methods used to find information. The training materials and directory of web resources were well-regarded.

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