

Plenary Session 2

Friday, September 20, Room B, 9.00

## **ENABLING THE EXPERT ERA**

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At the turn of the century we are entering a new era – the expert era. In the old era (the twentieth century) our concept of expertise was associated with qualified professionals. The highest quality, best funded library and information services were those for clinicians and focused on supporting this professional expertise and mystique. Major social changes have now called into question our understanding of where expertise lies. The shift in the burden of illness from acute to chronic conditions has created a generation of people living with long-term illness and disability (expert patients). At the same time revolutionary developments in information and communications technologies are opening up to patients and the public information sources which were once the exclusive preserve of professionals. Where once we thought of a divide between patient and professional information needs a more valid distinction is between expert users (who live or work with a health issue on a daily basis) and occasional users (who may have only episodic information needs on the topic). The paper will consider how library and information professionals can enable the expert era through development of universal access to key information sources. In the UK the government is committed to establishment, by April 2003, of an integrated National Knowledge Service meeting the needs of patients and professionals for the same high quality knowledge to support health care.