



Making connections between the University of Manchester and the NHS: the NoWNet / REGiSS-NHS Liaison Officer project



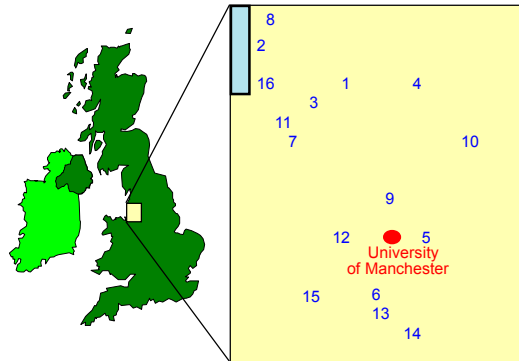
Angie Ryan, Norma Blackburn*, Valerie Ferguson, Alastair Flett, Diana Leitch, Alan Neville, Lesley Spellman, Katy Woolfenden (All John Rylands University Library of Manchester except *, based at Preston Guild Community NHS Healthcare Trust).

Building on an existing contract with the Postgraduate Dean for the John Rylands University Library of Manchester (JRULM) to provide operational and advisory services to postgraduate centre librarians and doctors in training in the NHS, the NoWNet project was launched in 1994 to provide the infrastructure to make access at clinical sites to a range of databases licensed to the JRULM possible. Considerable upgrading, including sharing the costs of a 2MB link from the University to some NHS sites, was required before phase 2 (1997-1999) could take place. A range of SilverPlatter health related databases mounted on REGiSS (formerly Rybase), the JRULM's electronic gateway, was made available to sixteen trusts on twenty clinical sites around the region to improve and encourage access for University staff and students. Particular attention was focussed on EMBASE, and a deal was also struck to make this database freely available to all NHS staff as well as members of the University of Manchester. It soon became clear that a full time member of staff was required to provide the level of service and support that the JRULM wished to offer.

THE PROJECT

In 1999 joint funding between the JRULM and the North West Region enabled the appointment of a Liaison Officer (Angie Ryan) for one year to address barriers to access and use of the databases such as:

- a) connectivity between the NHS and University networks
- b) training needs and skills gaps of librarians at NHS sites
- c) promotion of EMBASE to users
- d) provision of training materials for use by librarians
- e) improved remote access for University staff and students by the extended roll-out of ATHENS passwords.



THE CLINICAL SITES

1. Blackburn
2. Blackpool
3. Bolton
4. Bury
5. Central Manchester*
6. Christie Hospital*
7. Preston Community
8. Lancaster
9. North Manchester
10. Oldham
11. Preston Acute
12. Salford*
13. South Manchester*
14. Stockport*
15. Trafford
16. Ormskirk

* Direct connection to University network already in place

THE BASELINE SITUATION

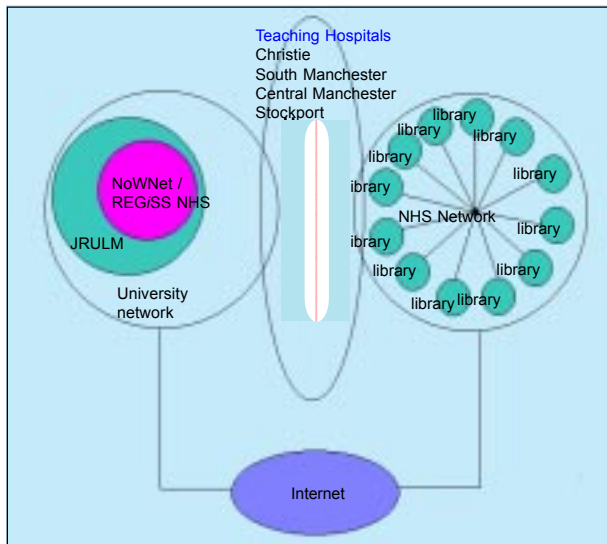
The situation that greeted the project officer when she arrived in post highlighted the two major issues that needed to be addressed:

Connectivity

Of the 12 sites that were eligible for NoWNet and not already directly linked to the University, 4 were connected. The migration from the existing regional network to NHSNet was an added complication.

Publicity

When surveyed, around half of the clinical site librarians felt sure they knew what NoWNet was, but only 10% had publicised the service to their users beyond the usual word of mouth.



THE ACTION PLAN

A four pronged plan was designed to tackle these issues:

Repackage as REGiSS NHS

A relaunch was thought necessary to kick start the project's momentum and give it a new image.

A User-Education Programme

In depth training events were held both centrally at JRULM and locally for outlying librarian's convenience

Athens Rollout ATHENS

All site libraries were encouraged to promote Athens registration to their users.

MC Dial-Up accounts Manchester Computing

Manchester Computing dial-up internet accounts were set up at appropriate sites to provide PCs which had University of Manchester IP addresses and would allow access to licensed databases.

RESULTS

By the end of the funded NoWNet / REGiSS NHS project the project team had taken advantage of technical solutions such as the widescale ATHENS rollout in both the UK Higher Education and NHS sectors, and the use of Manchester Computing Dial-Up accounts to achieve more than the initial stated aim of the project. By January 2001 numerous databases were available including:

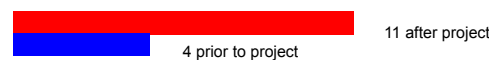
- Medline
- Embase
- PSYCInfo
- ISI Web of Science
- CINAHL
- SportDiscus
- AMED
- etc.
- and a host of full text electronic journals



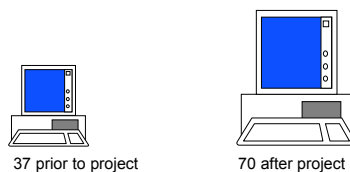
RESULTS

A final questionnaire was carried out to measure the impact of the NoWNet / REGiSS NHS Liaison Officer Project, which revealed further major successes:

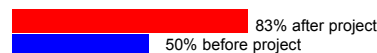
a - an increase of almost 200% in NHS sites connected to NoWNet / REGiSS NHS



b - double the number of PCs attached to the networks.



c - An increase in the use of Embase. 83% of libraries were using Embase by the end of the project compared to 50% at the beginning.



CONCLUSIONS

The twelve month long NoWNet / REGiSS NHS Liaison Officer Project demonstrated a number of things:

- 1 - The speed with which the information world is moving, particularly in the academic and health sectors.
- 2- The need to be opportunistic in incorporating best solution technologies into your strategy as they become available - as was the case with ATHENS.
- 3 - Communication is the key to successful service provider / consumer relationships. The project could not have achieved such success without the Liaison Officer's initial audit and then continued publicity drive in the form of posters and training sessions, not to mention the wide variety of technical support she offered.
- 4 - Collaboration between HE and the NHS is key in providing seamless information access for clinical students and practitioners.
- 5 - Successful service provision leads to greater service demand.