

Cooperation in the Independent Health Libraries Sector

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CHILL (Consortium of Health Independent Libraries in London) brings together library and information services of national and international importance in the health and biomedical field which are based in London. The capital has a rich medical library environment, but most co-operative initiatives have been centred on higher education and the National Health Service. CHILL, whose members are outside those sectors, has been established to cater for the needs of this otherwise unrepresented type of library.

CHILL's objectives are to act as a forum, to provide mutual support, to manage projects, to share resources, to represent the interests of the Consortium externally and to provide a joint response to national information or health initiatives.

CHILL has a broad range of members, including major library and information services such as the British Medical Association and the Royal Society of Medicine; medical, nursing and veterinary Royal Colleges; other services for discrete groups of users such as the British Dental Association; research institutes such as the National Institute for Medical Research, (part of the Medical Research Council) and patient support and public information organisations such as the Family Planning Association. There are 26 members in total.

One of the first initiatives was to organise a serials consortium, which is now in its 3rd year of operation and has been a great success. A deal for book purchasing followed. Another priority has been training and awareness. Courses or talks have been arranged on cataloguing, the Cochrane database, BIOME, professional qualification, copyright, marketing and intranets. Regular quarterly meetings and an active email list also ensure that the group acts as a professional network for members, many of whom are working in isolation. News of the group's existence is beginning to spread and its new Web-site, with a full directory of members, has recently been re-launched. CHILL has also started responding to national initiatives (e.g. the Full Disclosure project, which is setting national priorities for retrospective cataloguing).

Time is a scarce resource and members are hard-pressed to devote time to CHILL, however the benefits of such collaborative activity in bringing together independent health libraries and giving them a voice is clear, and is enthusiastically supported by all.