

## **Developing the Evidence Base in Public Health and Health Improvement – the Crucial Role of the Librarian**

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Recent government initiatives in the United Kingdom, such as Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation, the NHS Plan and A Research and Development Strategy for Public Health, emphasise a modern patient-centred healthcare service with strategies to improve health and reduce inequalities. Critical to the success of these policies is the building of an evidence base for public health and health improvement activities so that standards may be set, research commissioned and authoritative information and guidance be disseminated to those working in public health and health promotion. In turn establishment of the evidence base relies on effective searching of the literature, an essential role for the healthcare librarian.

This paper describes the experiences and outcomes of an ongoing project to provide high quality literature searches for health development professionals (Smoking, Health Impact Assessment and Community Development topic groups) working for a national agency. The project results will contribute to the creation of an up-to-date map of the evidence base for public health. Several important principles emerging from the first stages of the study are outlined:

- Librarians have the key skills to produce search results of the necessary standard in a timely and effective manner
- Close liaison with the project team to develop and agree search strategies is essential
- The search strategy should employ multiple methods and a wide range of information sources covering multiple disciplines and research in progress
- A combination of thesaurus and free-text searching is required for comprehensive searching of electronic databases

Additional findings arising as the project progresses will be summarised at the conference. It is intended that this paper will promote librarians as essential partners in the development of evidence based practice whilst also allowing dissemination of experiences of those conducting literature searches in the public health field.