

## The outreach librarian as a substitute course and continuous professional development mentor to nurses and allied health professionals

Elinor Harriss<sup>1</sup> and Tatjana Petrinic<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Bodleian Health Care Libraries, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK*

Corresponding author: Elinor Harriss, eli.harriss@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

### Abstract

**Introduction:** The Bodleian Health Care Libraries have a dedicated outreach team to provide information services to the staff and students at the University of Oxford and to the staff employed by the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The team delivered 420 one- to-one (or face-to-face) training sessions from October 2014 to September 2015. Of these, 127 1-1 sessions were with nurses, midwives, allied health professionals (AHPs), and clinical support workers or healthcare assistants who work in the hospitals in Oxford.

We have found that this group often come to our libraries in a stressed state and in need of our help in the form of mentoring. They receive inadequate time and attention from tutors teaching external modules, who themselves are suffering from excessive workloads and staffing constraints and therefore cannot provide the level of help required by these library users. In addition, it is significant to note that nurses and midwives working in England will have to start preparing for revalidation with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), with a change of the rules starting from April 2016 which will require staff to provide evidence of 40 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) over three years, which will increase the pressure staff face.

In this presentation, we follow Parsloe's definition of mentoring as a "supportive process" in which our role is to confirm what the staff member needs help with, encourage them to use our resources to find information, provide support at every stage, and help them to evaluate their progress or success.

**Objectives:** The aim of this presentation is to describe how members of the outreach team are meeting the mentoring needs of nursing staff and AHPs who come to us for assistance, exploring the challenges and opportunities this aspect of our work offer us.

**Methods:** We used interviews from 1-1 consultations and observational data from a CPD club in a hospital palliative care department to answer this question.

**Results and Discussion:** We have found that our role as librarians is to step in for: literature backup (mediated searches, advanced search skills training, critical appraisal, finding full text articles, setting up search alerts); referencing help (manual and software based - Mendeley training is provided); encouragement with dissertations and help with repeat journal submissions; pastoral care and empathy.

**Conclusions:** Our findings follow the characteristics of mentoring widely described in the literature. We will continue to evaluate our contribution in 2016, recording any changes in this library user group's library service and mentoring needs that occur as a result of the NMC's revalidation policy.

**Key words:** librarians, teaching, mentors, professional development, nursing, allied health personnel

## Introduction

The Bodleian Health Care Libraries have a dedicated outreach team to provide information services to the staff and students at the University of Oxford and to the staff employed by the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH). There are currently six librarians and three senior library assistants in the team, and the full time equivalent of the librarians equates roughly to 4 members of staff. The outreach services provided include: answering quick enquiries in person, by telephone or by email; conducting literature searches; one-to-one (face-to-face) or group teaching and training sessions; delivering library inductions; presenting at meetings or seminars to raise awareness of publicity campaigns; and attending regular meetings in the departments that the librarians have been assigned to.

This paper reports on the observation from the outreach team that they are increasingly providing mentoring support as substitute course and continuous professional development (CPD) tutors to nurses and allied health professionals from the OUH during one-to-one sessions. For example, the team delivered 420 one-to-one training sessions from October 2014 to September 2015. Of these, 127 1-1 sessions were with nurses, midwives, allied health professionals (AHPs), and clinical support workers or healthcare assistants who work in the hospitals in Oxford. The team have found that this group often come to our libraries in a stressed state. They receive inadequate time and attention from tutors teaching external modules, who themselves are suffering from excessive workloads and staffing constraints and therefore cannot provide the level of help required by these library users. In addition, it is significant to note that nurses and midwives working in England will have to start preparing for revalidation with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), with a change of the rules starting from April 2016 which will require staff to provide evidence of 40 hours of CPD over three years, which will increase the pressure staff face.

There is published literature about librarians mentoring each other, such as an article by Ptolomey which describes mentoring as “(involving) a passing on of skills from a mentor (the experienced craftsman) to the mentee (the apprentice and less experienced learner)”. She discusses the dual responsibilities involved in mentoring, with the mentor enabling the mentee in a process which has a combined career and psychosocial focus (1). Similarly, there is a wealth of literature about the importance of mentoring for nurses, as outlined in a recent blog post (2). Yet as there is currently little published literature to link the mentoring process and the skills involved to the role of the librarian who works in a hospital environment, this paper seeks to fill that gap. In this paper, we follow Parsloe’s definition of mentoring as a “supportive process” in which our role is to confirm what the staff member needs help with, encourage them to use our resources to find information, provide support at every stage, and help them to evaluate their progress or success (3).

## Objectives

The aim of this paper is to describe how members of the outreach team are meeting the mentoring needs of nursing staff and AHPs who come to us for assistance, exploring the challenges and opportunities this aspect of our work offer us.

## Methods

The data collection methods used were: interviews from one-to-one consultations; interviews with individual members of the team to tease out further details about the mentoring aspects of their one-to-one sessions; and observational data from a CPD club in a hospital palliative care department.

The data were gathered from October 2014 to April 2016.

## Results

### *Mentoring needs*

In sum, the consensus from the data collected showed that our role as librarians during one-to-ones is to step in for: literature backup (mediated searches, advanced search skills training, critical appraisal, finding full text articles, setting up search alerts); referencing help (manual and software based - Mendeley training is provided); encouragement with dissertations and help with repeat journal submissions; pastoral care and empathy.

The interviews with individual librarians about the mentoring needs of the nurses and AHPs they meet for one-to-one consultations revealed further details. Readers from these categories contact the librarians, usually directly by email or telephone, as a result of word-of-mouth promotion from a colleague or course tutor, after a library induction session provided by the librarian at the start of a course or the academic year, or occasionally the librarians' details are found from the library website.

Frequently, the readers contacted the librarian initially because they required help with assignments.

The interview data suggested also that the mentoring and information needs varied depending on what stage the reader was at, and on the type of course. "Mentoring? Teaching? Pastoral Care? All together", was a comment from one librarian. She described how nurses and AHPs come to a consultation with her in library in a stressed state, but they quickly relax once they tell her what their goal is, when they have had a chance to talk about any problems with their home institution or about how their course is funded, and they find out how the librarian is equipped to help them meet their needs. For example, Operating Department Practitioners (ODPs) came to her for help initially to find relevant literature for a poster, which is their first assignment on a particular course. The librarian not only helped them to retrieve the relevant references, she also assisted by providing a poster template to get them started with the task. A significant characteristic of the ODPs is that they are often new to the academic tasks involved in completing assignments, from searching for articles to citing and referencing them accurately. In contrast, nursing staff often come to the library when they start a masters course, many years after their undergraduate nursing degree, and need to have their confidence boosted by a supportive and understanding librarian, as well as requiring assistance with the literature backup tasks. The nursing staff therefore have experience of academic tasks that the ODPs may lack, which is why these staff groups require a different approach from the librarian.

An unanticipated finding from the interview data was the importance for nursing staff and AHPs of having the one-to-one in the library. The location of the consultation is significant because the librarian can provide non-judgemental, confidential and neutral support in a safe place, away from the gaze of the readers' colleagues in the ward or department, and for no fee.

In contrast to the interview data, the outcome from the observational data from a CPD club in a hospital palliative care department was that the group of occupational therapists, physiotherapists and nursing staff who meet on a fortnightly basis for an hour of discussion require very little attention from the librarian, only that relevant books are purchased for the local library's lending stock. This group mentor each other, providing help with references for presentations and critical appraisal sessions without any input required from a librarian, and checking that each member of the team is building up their own CPD portfolio for their various professional qualifications.

One finding from all of the data collected is that nurses are not contacting the library for direct help with NMC revalidation yet.

### *Challenges*

One of the challenges discussed in the interviews with individual librarians involved capacity. For example, one librarian was so popular with the first year midwifery students who came to her with the same assignment, that she stipulated that the students would have to use their course institution's library service, and only come to her when they needed assistance at the dissertation stage. Other challenges related to the lack of an obvious tool to evaluate mentoring: one librarian referred to the danger of bad mentors, the "dark side of mentoring", the risk of doing damage if unchecked by an evaluation process.

### *Opportunities*

The data from the interviews with individual librarians revealed that one- to-ones require mentoring skills such as listening, guiding the reader towards their goal, and instilling the small steps to reach that overall aim. Listening skills were considered to be especially important for finding out about the readers' training needs, what their understanding of concepts such as Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) was like, and where to fill in other gaps in their information literacy knowledge.

There was mixed opinion about whether any formal mentoring training was necessary for the librarian role, aside from experience of conducting one-to-ones and developing working relationships with members of these staff groups. One librarian reported that the skills needed for one-to-ones with this group are: an understanding of the higher education process; the differences between the Bachelor of Science degree, a Masters, or a PhD in the British education system; an understanding of nursing backgrounds and their education; an understanding of how courses are funded; and general information literacy, listening, interpersonal skills. Desk research, as well as careful questioning during the one-to-one, can fill in any gaps in the librarians' knowledge and understanding.

Generally, the development of a working relationship between the librarian and the nurse or AHP through the mentoring aspects of one-to- one consultations was seen as extremely positive, leading to job satisfaction.

### **Discussion**

The story from this data is about the library and information needs of nurses and AHPs, coming to the library with a specific goal in mind that they require help with, either from a librarian or from a senior library assistant. The librarians are experienced at working with these groups of readers in the library, and while an assumption was that it would be stressful for the librarians to work with stressed readers, the interview data reveals this not to be the case. They consider that they have the necessary skills, as outlined in recent papers such as that by Sen et al (4), to provide the support required. The finding that the library has an importance as a safe, neutral space in a busy hospital is one that requires further attention.

## Conclusions

Our findings follow the characteristics of mentoring widely described in the literature. We conclude that the skills involved in mentoring are commonly used in one-to-one consultations, and argue that this paper demonstrates the important role of the library service in supporting nursing staff and AHPs' professional development. We will continue to evaluate our contribution in 2016, recording any changes in this library user group's library service and mentoring needs that occur as a result of the NMC's revalidation policy.

## REFERENCES

1. Ptolomey J. Learning and teaching in action: mentoring: supporting the library and information professional? *Health Info Libr J.* 2008;25(4):309-12.
2. Mentoring [Internet]. NHS Thames Valley and Wessex Leadership Academy; 2015 [updated 15/10/15; cited 01/04/16]. Available from: <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/tvw-knowledge-hub/2015/10/15/mentoring/>.
3. Parsloe E. *The manager as coach and mentor.* 2nd ed. London: Institute of Personnel and Development; 1999.
4. Sen B, Villa R, Chapman E. The roles, skills, training needs and contributions of health library and information professionals. *J Eur Assoc Health Inf Libr.* 2014;10(2):11-4.