

Beyond borrowing books: make the most out of libraries

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Abstract

Using the library and the multitude of services that libraries offer can help your personal and professional development. Getting to know about the resources available to you will enable you to get the most out of the whole library. This article explains how healthcare assistants (HCAs) and associate practitioners (APs) can exploit the services on offer and develop their current knowledge base. When HCAs and APs become more confident and competent in using libraries, resources and new ways of learning can be accessed.

Key words

● Access ● Information retrieval ● Knowledge ● Learning

Libraries are also known by a number of different names, for example, learning resource centres or info hubs. They all provide a number of services depending on their customers' needs. Libraries can be found in a variety of venues—schools, colleges, universities, hospital trusts and in the community, such as the local library.

Healthcare assistants (HCAs) and assistant practitioners (APs) may need to access a library to help them with their studies or to help them find answers to questions they may have about the health and social needs of their patients. They can find help and answers to their needs by talking to the staff in the library or by using the equipment provided there. Most libraries will have internet access that will enable you to search the library's catalogue and access the world wide web.

Library and information services provide you with a place to study, retrieve information and carry out research. Study areas are designed in such a way that you can work with other HCAs and APs in a group. Working in small groups permits you to discuss assignments or prepare for presentations. Some areas of the library may be designated quiet zones or silent study spaces where people work alone, undertaking more private study.

The librarian

The librarian (sometimes called the information professional) can guide and show you how to find relevant, up-to-date, good quality information. He or she will have been professionally trained and have a wide knowledge of how to use information resources.

The library catalogue

The library catalogue is the library's search tool and, once you have mastered how to use this tool fully, your ability to search and locate information will be greatly enhanced. This tool is the key to finding what is available in the library. The catalogue allows you to perform a number of actions:

- Find and locate books, DVDs and other media
- Find and access e-books
- Search for government reports
- Check journal availability
- Search for journal articles.
- Using the library catalogue can be straight forward, for example, entering a name in a field.

There are other options available to help you search for the item you require. If you do not know the name of the author, for example, you could search by:

- Using words or phrases that are associated with the item
- Using the title of the item if you know it
- Using a keyword that is linked with the item.

These are the most common options that library users make use of. There are, however, a number of other combinations that can be used to help refine and hone a search. You may see the word truncation used when searching the catalogue. The use of truncation allows you to broaden your search and provides many more possible responses. The librarian will be able to help you with this aspect of searching as it can be complex but, once you understand how to use this option, then you will be able to generate many more responses to your search request.

If the library you are using has a journals collection (and most do), then the library catalogue is also able to help you locate or find out if the library has the journal that you are interested in (either hard copy or e-journal). Sometimes libraries use the word periodical instead of journal.

When you have retrieved the items from the search, the next step is to locate it. There will be an option in the catalogue that will help you seek more details about the item. These can be very useful and contains information about:

- The author
- The location of the text in the library (shelf mark)
- The availability of the item
- E-book availability
- Bibliographic details (when the book was published and by whom).
- Services offered.

Usually, you are required to become a member of the library, and a library card is issued which allows you to use the full range of services.

The services offered in a library will depend on its function, size and customer base, for example, the Royal College of Nursing library (one of the biggest specialist libraries in the world) would, as you would expect, have a predominance of resources related to the profession of nursing. It is important to note that these resources (in their many different formats) are allied to nursing, for example, there will be resources related to the professions of midwifery, physiotherapy and medicine. There will also be a number of resources related to the social and physical sciences.

Book loaning

The loaning of books is perhaps the most common feature associated with libraries. However, some libraries, such as the British Library, do not permit book loaning. These are called reference libraries. Reference collections will include items such as dictionaries or rare manuscripts.

Libraries are more than just a collection of books. There are other media that a library can loan, for example, CD-ROMs, DVDs and videos. If the book that you are searching for is not available in the library, some libraries that will endeavour to get a copy of that book for you. This is called an inter-library loan, there may be a charge for this service. When you request an inter-library loan item, which are not just limited to books, you will have to fill in a request form of some kind. The more details you put on this form requesting an inter-library loan, the more chance you will have of having the item located.

Renewal of books can take place face to face, online and on the telephone. If nobody else requests the item you have on loan you can renew it. Remember there is a set period of time you can have the item on loan for: failure to renew on time (being overdue) can incur a fine.

Journal stock

It is unusual for the library to loan journals. The collection of journals held by a library will reflect the library's purpose, for example, it is unlikely that a public library will stock the *British Journal of Healthcare Assistants* but, a Trust, University or PCT library would more than likely have this journal in its holdings.

Thousands of journals (electronic and print) can be accessed through libraries. Many will have a range of journals but, just as it may be with books, an inter-library loan service may be available. Again there may be a charge made for this service.

Online services

The catalogue is an example of an online service that can be used to renew items or make reservations via the internet. The advantage of online services are that they can be viewed at home or at your place of work (if permitted). There are many more examples of online services.

The provision of computers in a library is now commonplace and, because of this, you have access to the world wide web at your finger tips. The computers available for you to use are often subjected to terms and conditions to prevent abuse of the service. Many libraries offer wireless networks, providing you with access to the internet from a wireless device.



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Key Points

- Libraries are more than just a collection of books.
- The most important resource in the library are the people working there.
- There are many services available to healthcare assistants and assistant practitioners in the library.
- Getting to know what services are available and how to use them can help you develop your skills and knowledge base.

Many computers will be connected to a printer or photocopier, which means users can photocopy or print. There is usually a charge made for this service. You must make yourself aware of copyright: all photocopying and printing will be subject to copyright laws. There are set legal limits for how much printing and photocopying you can do. Regulations about copyright, printing and photocopying are usually found by each machine and also available on the library website.

Information literacy services

There is a wealth of information available in many libraries, and it will take time to access it all and get the most out of it. Some libraries will offer a number of bespoke (tailor made) information literacy sessions. These may include:

- Introduction to the library sessions—meeting the staff, using the catalogue
- Help with referencing and avoiding plagiarism
- Study skills and assessment drop in sessions
- Presentation skills
- Undertaking literature searches
- Services for disabled people and for those with additional needs.

Sometimes these sessions are carried out in groups, working with other library users. Appointments may be made for a one to one session with the library staff. A number of services are offered by staff members on a one to one basis. An appointment can usually be made at the information counter or via the email, telephone or fax.

When you visit a library that is new to you, find out if they have orientation tours. These tours will help you find your way around the library physically and virtually. This is usually a hands-on opportunity to become familiar with some of the fundamental tools and services offered, for example, the library catalogue.

Conclusion

Getting the most out of the library and all the skills offered will help you in a number of ways. Having the confidence to seek help and advice can enhance your ability to care safely for people, providing care that is evidence based. **BJHCA**