Fundamental Aspects of Finding and Using Information

***Note***

Health care practice and knowledge are constantly changing and developing as new research and treatments, changes in procedures, drugs and equipment become available.

The author and publishers have, as far as is possible, taken care to confirm that the information complies with the latest standards of practice and legislation.

# Fundamental Aspects of Finding and Using Information

A Guide for Students of Nursing and Health

*Barbara Freeman and David Thompson*

# Foreword

There is a vast amount of information in books, journals and (not least) electronic format on the internet. A simple Google search with the word 'nursing' has just given me 130,000,000 'hits' – which if my reading of zeros is correct, is one hundred and thirty million references. I've just worked out that if I spent two minutes looking at each reference, I would be spending the next 49 years of my life in continuous reading, with no time for sleep, food, or visits to the loo!

So how do we manage the vast amount of information at our fingertips? How can we find out which of those 130 million hits are relevant, valid and reliable?

The problem we have as health care workers is not the lack of information on which to inform our practice, but the fact that there is so much information from so many different sources.

A significant part of all health care professionals' training is now built around how to find information, evaluate the vast variety of data bases, access on line journals and generally handle the 130 million hits that we often get when looking for information.

This excellent short book is written by two experts in the field of health care information organisation. Barbara Freeman and David Thompson are both librarians who have worked for many years in a university library specialising in health care information. They have been key players in the introduction of the huge electronic systems that now form such an important part of data access within our library systems. Much of their working lives has been spent teaching students how to access and use information, while also providing additional one-to-one support for individual students in the library setting. This book is the fruit of that expert knowledge and practical applications.

Never before has one book on this topic been such a single core resource for health care students.

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# Contents

# Introduction

In this book we aim to show that finding and using good quality information is a lot less difficult than you might think. Knowing how to use the resources available to you via libraries and the Internet efficiently brings much quicker, and better, results than trying to find information in a hit and miss kind of way, and doesn't require advanced IT skills. Just follow the simple strategies outlined in this volume and you will gain the basic information-seeking skills that are all you need to get started.

As you become more confident, your ability to evaluate sources will develop too. You will surprise yourself – not just by finding information, but by starting to ask yourself just how good that information is.

## How nurses use information

In January 2008 the *Nursing Standard* published an article by Rosalind Bertulis, of the Royal College of Nursing, based on a literature review of nurses' use of information for evidence-based practice (Bertulis 2008). She found that 'perceived lack of time' and lack of information technology skills are the main barriers preventing nurses from accessing information . She also found that nurses 'tend to base the selection of information sources on convenience and accessibility rather than quality'.

Clearly, accurate information and knowledge are vital, and a successful practitioner in the 21st century needs to be able to continue to acquire and effectively manage up-to-date, quality information. He or she needs to have effective 'information skills'.

## What are 'information skills'?

The three key information skills that we shall cover in this book are:

- **Finding** – knowing when, where and how to search for appropriate information
- **Evaluating** – judging the quality of the information you have found
- **Using** – referencing comprehensively and accurately to ensure that the work of others is acknowledged.

## How this book is organised

The contents of this volume fall into four key areas:

- **Getting started** – some things you need to think about before you launch into your quest for information; what help is at hand from libraries and electronic sources; and advice on what you can, can't and should do.
- **Books** – finding and using information from that most traditional of sources, books, and related media such as e-books and recordings.
- **Journal articles** – understanding the tools that are available to you to find references and access journal articles – possibly the area that many students struggle with most.
- **Internet resources** – using the Internet efficiently and critically to find good quality websites with a wealth of information including statistics, images, patient information and the evidence base for health care.

Our concluding chapter suggests ways in which you might want to follow up the research you have, hopefully, initiated after reading this volume. Whether you now want to move on to actually writing your assignment, or simply want to keep in touch with new developments in your chosen area, we provide useful hints and recommend some helpful additional reading.

## How to use this book

It really is up to you. We all learn in different ways, and it would be presumptuous of the authors to suggest that one way of using the book is better than any other. However, our aim from the start has been to make a book that can be dipped into – with cross-references and a reliable index enabling students to focus on what is important for them. At the same time we have set out to create a narrative which develops logically, and stands being read from cover to cover.

## Our background

This book is based on our experience of working directly with nursing and midwifery students in a specialist health library at De Montfort University, a leading centre of nursing and midwifery education. We are well aware of the difficulties and anxieties many students experience in trying to find the right information for academic assignments and hope in this book to give you more confidence in approaching your information searching.

Some of our examples are based on our own library, and we are aware that libraries of other libraries may differ in some details – but the essentials remain the same. Check out your library and the services available to you, and if in doubt about anything, ask library staff.

## Target audience

This book is intended for nursing, midwifery and health care students at undergraduate level. This includes everyone from first year pre-registration students through to practitioners studying for further specialist qualifications.

We hope you find the contents useful, and enjoy the experience of discovering more about information skills relating to your chosen profession.

## Reference

Bertulis, R. (2008) Barriers to accessing evidence-based information. *Nursing Standard*, 14 May, **22**(36), pp. 35–39.

PART I

# Getting started

# Know your library

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## In this chapter

- Which libraries can you use?
- How libraries are organised
- Where can you get help?
- SCONUL Access

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A better title for this chapter might have been 'Know your libraries', because whether student or employee, or indeed both, you have access to a wide range of libraries – not just the one where you work or study. Take a few moments to think about what resources are available to you, and the number may surprise you. Typically a student will have access to most or all of the following:

- Specialist health/nursing library
- Large multi-subject university library
- Workplace library
- Other university libraries
- National Library for Health
- RCN library (and libraries of other professional bodies)
- Public libraries

Almost without exception these libraries will have websites where you can discover a great deal about the services and resources offered, and their availability. Most will offer extensive 'virtual' facilities, so distance is no longer the often insurmountable barrier it once was.

Online catalogues are the norm nowadays, and access to full text journals grows more important by the day. E-books are predicted to be the next big growth area. In general, the library catalogue is likely to be accessible to any web user, but e-journals and e-books will be password controlled to permit access only to their registered students.