

London Health Libraries visit to Public Health England library at Colindale: Friday, October 23, 2015

Public Health England (PHE)

The organisation was formed in 2013 as a result of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. It brought together over 70 organisations principally including the Health Protection Agency and the regional health observatories. It is an autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health with a remit to protect and improve the nation's health and well-being, and reduce health inequalities. There is a staff of five thousand, mostly scientists, researchers and public health professionals. They are distributed around the country in several locations with three large laboratory and office sites at Chilton, Oxfordshire; Porton, Wiltshire; and Colindale, London. Each site has a particular specialism, e.g. microbiology or radiation research, etc. However, plans were announced by the government three weeks ago to move all the laboratories to Harlow in Essex in 2018/19, occupying a former Glaxo Smith Kline site.

Library service

The library sits within the directorate of the chief knowledge officer. Under the chief knowledge officer is the head of knowledge management (Anne Brice). Anne Brice has overall management of the library and knowledge service and a team of knowledge and evidence specialists who work around the country embedded in PHE teams. The library service has three physical sites at Chilton, Porton and Colindale. There are about a dozen members of staff in all, consisting of the library and knowledge services manager, and in each library a library manager, senior library assistant and business manager. PHE is a knowledge driven organisation and the library plays its role within this, finding evidence and helping the new organisation to develop processes for capturing its knowledge and preventing duplication and loss.

Colindale library

The library has recently been refurbished and occupies a large space with comfortable seating area (and TV!), book stacks, periodical rolling stacks, rare books and theses collection, study and training space, and offices. The book stock consists of approximately 5,000 titles focusing on microbiology and infection control. New acquisitions focus very much on digital format (books and journals), so the physical book stock will not grow, but historical material does still get borrowed and will be retained. The periodical collection, largely inherited from the Health Protection Agency, in some instances goes back to the 1800s. The library is staffed Monday to Friday 9 AM until 5:30 PM, but is accessible out of hours.

Library management system: Bailey Solutions (shared by the three sites). This is available on the open internet as well as on the local intranet. There is a touch screen in the library. Self issue will be introduced in due course.

Library/information resources available to PHE staff

- books and journals (physical and electronic)
- NHS Core Content
- the following databases:
 - Social Policy And Practice
 - Global Health

- Scopus
- Colindale staff have access to London health libraries resources through interlibrary loan
- covered by the NHS Copyright Licence

Literature and evidence searching

This is a big part of what the library does and all the library staff is involved. A triage system is employed as such a high volume of requests is received. Unlike in the NHS, these tend to be large, in-depth, long-term projects, often systematic reviews registered on Prospero, leading to high profile publications. These are carried out by experienced teams used to getting the library involved, and entail discussion and development of complex search strategies (which are published in the final documents) resulting in several thousand search results. Literature search results are presented in Word or Endnote format, as preferred.

Grey literature sources consulted include: OpenGrey, Nice Evidence, HMIC and important websites especially WHO.

Knowledge management software used by library and public health England staff:

- enquiry management software (a searchable database of enquiries, time spent and resources used)
- Endnote reference management software: there is an institutional licence; essential for creating references from disparate sources
- Scopus: also used as an analytical tool for producing graphs/statistics on PHE publications
- Bailey Solutions knowledge management platform: includes library catalogue, access to electronic resources, and links to tagged external resources
- EPPI-Reviewer software is employed for screening, scanning and coding of studies retrieved through literature searches
- software is used to turn lists of references into current awareness bulletins on several topics
- discovery platform: this is coming soon. PHE will be able to feed back experience to NHS colleagues.

Future plans

PHE needs to map public health staff across the country, identifying who and where they are, and how to work with them. PHE libraries have plans to investigate extending access to their online subscribed resources to local authority public health teams via Athens, but there is currently no capacity to extend their literature searching services to them.

In conclusion

This was a most informative visit and we are grateful to Colindale library service for their hospitality.

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