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# Irish health sciences librarians supporting national clinical guideline development

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## **Irish health sciences librarians supporting national clinical guideline development.**

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### Introduction

This article describes how a new national group of health sciences librarians was established in Ireland to support the development of national clinical guidelines, the topic of a poster presented at EAHIL 2014.

### Background

The National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) was established in 2010 by the Irish Minister for Health as part of the Patient Safety First Initiative. The NCEC mission is to provide a framework for national endorsement of clinical guidelines and clinical audit to optimise patient and service user care. The NCEC define National Clinical Guidelines as “systematically developed statements, based on a thorough evaluation of the evidence, to assist practitioner and service users’ decisions about appropriate healthcare for specific clinical circumstances across the entire clinical system”<sup>1</sup>. The key stakeholders and participants developing clinical guidelines include clinicians, patient safety experts, healthcare managers, patient representatives and, more recently, librarians.

The development of new national clinical guidelines involves a six stage process to (1) Plan, (2) Develop, (3) Disseminate, (4) Implement, (5) Evaluate and (6) Revise each guideline. The NCEC sought the support of health sciences librarians for the second phase of the clinical guideline development process to: Develop the Guideline – search for clinical guidelines and research studies. NCEC considered health sciences librarians well placed to assist with the literature review phase needed to find the evidence to support new guidelines. Librarians based in various clinical settings in Ireland were already working with clinical teams to support research and guideline development, but this was a new approach to coordinating our work at a national level. The Chairperson of the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee approached the Chief Librarian at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) about finding librarians willing to support NCEC and an initial

meeting attended by the NCEC Director and librarians from RCSI and the Health Service Executive (HSE) was arranged to discuss ways in which librarian support could be formalised and standardised.

### Approach

The Health Science Librarians Group of the Library Association of Ireland (HSLG LAI) is the professional organisation representing health sciences librarians in Ireland and was an appropriate channel to invite health sciences librarians to work with the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee. A call for interest was sent to the HSLG mailing list and a number of librarians responded, some of whom were already working with clinical teams. The HSLG collated a list of librarians, located in hospital, academic medical and special libraries throughout Ireland who could provide systematic literature searches for clinical teams developing guidelines. Currently there are 16 librarians participating, with potential to work with clinical teams based on their location and their specialty.

### Discussion

This new national network of clinical librarians supporting NCEC guidelines is the first of its kind in Ireland. It comprises librarians from various institutions, in different locations throughout the country, who coordinate their work at a national level, under the umbrella of their professional organisation. The HSLG Committee considered the practicalities of establishing this new cooperative project and sought suggestions and feedback from its members at every stage of the process. As a result, the HSLG established a centralised online service whereby clinical teams can request literature searches using an online form. The online form is located on the NCEC website, and requests are submitted to a HSLG librarian who acts as coordinator. Queries are allocated to individual clinical librarians based on the topic, the location of the clinical guideline team, and the availability of a librarian to provide literature searches. Librarians will also provide advanced search skills training tailored for the groups clinical guideline topic.

The HSLG believed it was important to standardise the approach of this group of clinical librarians to ensure that a consistent and excellent standard of evidence forms the basis of new national clinical guidelines. To this end a draft Literature Search Strategy Protocol was written and circulated to members for feedback. A final protocol was then circulated to members for approval, along with new templates for formatting Literature

Search Answers. Some aspects of the service were clarified as standard across the board. For example, the provision of full text documents was not within the remit of this service as each member librarian works in an organisation with its own institutional resource subscription licences, document supply services, and membership policies. Clinical teams would be referred to their own organisation's library service to request full text document supply. Each librarian would supply a Literature Search Answer using a table showing the resources searched, the number of results found and appraised from each resource, and the number of results selected for the Answer based on the criteria described by the clinical team. The librarian would also include details of the search strategy. Other aspects of the Answer format could be negotiated and arranged directly between the clinical team and the librarian assigned to the topic. The clinical team could decide if they wanted to put a maximum limit on the number of results returned to them, or if they wanted abstracts, or links to free full text when available.

In May 2014 the Health Science Libraries Group held its annual conference in Dublin and invited speakers included the Director of National Clinical Effectiveness, Kathleen MacLellan from the Department of Health. Dr MacLellan spoke about the national clinical effectiveness agenda, and specifically referred to the benefits of librarian support for the development of national clinical guidelines. Clinical Librarians have been invited to attend the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee Annual Symposium in November 2014. This is an opportunity for librarians to support clinicians with the ultimate aim of improving patient safety and patient care at a national level. Clinical Librarians have also contributed to the Resources section of the NCEC website for clinicians, with guides on conducting a literature search, and links to our national health repository Lenus. This project also provides an opportunity for clinical librarians to work more closely with clinical teams in their organisation, as well as promoting library services and resources on a national level. Current arrangements mean that librarians are utilising their own institutions subscribed resources to provide literature searches, but there may be future potential for further national subscriptions similar to our national access to the Cochrane Library.

This article is based on a poster presented at EAHIL this year. The poster presented an outline of this new national service and its potential impact on the clinical research evidence base for national clinical guidelines,

and the benefits of coordinating and standardising the work of librarians in Ireland. We were delighted to be awarded an EAHIL Scholarship and the Best Poster prize.

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<sup>1</sup> National Clinical Effectiveness Committee. Guideline Developers Manual. Dublin: Department of Health, 2013. Available at: <http://health.gov.ie/>