

Promoting remote use of e-journals by RCN members across the UK and abroad

Paper given at the UKSG seminar 'ER: promoting and managing electronic resources without the trauma', November 2002

The Royal College of Nursing has been offering remote access to electronic journals since 2001. Working together with our partners: Blackwell Publishing, Health Communications Network, and more recently Ovid, we aim to provide a friendly service. However, ensuring that the service is used effectively by our large membership – different information literacy skills, different health sectors, in the UK and abroad – is a challenge. This paper outlines the various strategies employed to meet that challenge. Methods used include links from the database British Nursing Index (also available remotely) to the e-journals, as well as being able to search the journals separately. RCN Library and Information Services have also worked with RCN colleagues developing the award winning online Learning Zone to ensure that the e-journals are promoted within an online learning environment. A survey to check whether we are meeting our members' needs was due to take place in February 2003.



JACKIE LORD

Head of Library and
Information Services
Royal College of Nursing

Introduction

RCN Library and Information Services' vision was to provide RCN members with increased access to quality electronic nursing information when and where they needed it and free at the point of use. From the beginning of the project our guiding principles were ease of use, seamless access, and a small but relevant collection of electronic journals that could be built up gradually. Obviously, these are very different from our on-site access principles, where we provide a huge range of electronic and physical resources.

Partnership has been central to the success of this project, working closely with stakeholders in the RCN including members. As a result of focus groups from the RCN Information Strategy, we were able to highlight what was possible. As a result of this, RCN members voted for a subscription increase at the Annual General Meeting in 2000 for new services including access to electronic information.

We have also worked very closely with RCN staff including colleagues from RCN Publishing,

who publish a wide variety of journals, colleagues from the Life Long Learning team, and the Web team. Externally we worked closely with publishers, particularly Blackwell Publishing and recently Ovid.

Why was remote access important to us?

The RCN currently has 340,000 members scattered across the United Kingdom and we also have members working and living abroad. The largest of the RCN Libraries is in London, the UK Library. We offer a wide variety of services, including telephone, postal loans, fax and e-mail services. We also have libraries in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we have about 43 Resource Centres across the UK that we set up with a variety of different partners, including nursing homes, further education colleges, NHS Trusts, and in private health care. However, remote access to electronic information seemed to us the only viable way to achieve an equal service.

Why simple and easy to use?

It is very difficult for us to define our average user. We have members from all aspects of the health service in the UK. Many of our members are in the academic sector, both as educators and as students. We have a lot of members in the independent sector, in general practice, and working for private health care. These members have varying access to information and learning support. We also have a lot of members who are no longer practising as nurses, but they still want to keep up to date professionally and use their skills within the professions that they have gone on to. These can also include members who are retired, but are still playing a very active professional role.

Our members have a huge variety of information literacy skills. From nurses with PhDs, to nurses with very little information literacy skills, particularly those who are now returning to work after a career break and some of the older nurses. The most common RCN member is a woman in her early forties, but there is a huge variety.

What is the new service?

We have made available, free of charge to all our members remotely, access to the bibliographic database British Nursing Index and also to eight key nursing journals online and in full text. The guiding principle of this remote project was to keep it small and simple to use. Within the UK Library we have over 400 printed nursing journals, with an accompanying document delivery service, but for the electronic access we wanted to start small and make sure our members were able to use it.

The licence for British Nursing Index and the electronic journals limits the usage to personal and private use by RCN members. We chose British Nursing Index as the key nursing database, partly because we are a partner in it with Bournemouth University and Poole and Salisbury NHS Trusts, but also because we knew that one of the things the partners were trying to achieve was that the database should be extremely easy to use. For remote access, where the majority of members won't have support from librarians, it is much simpler than other databases, such as CINAHL. So

again, we were looking for different things than we would when choosing our databases for on-site usage where we have a vast range of electronic databases available.

British Nursing Index is almost comprehensive for UK nursing journal articles and also covers a wide variety of other English language journals. Some of the limits of the database, such as it not having abstracts, means that it is extremely easy to use, particularly for free text searching by members accessing these services on their own. It is not easy for an inexperienced user to do a search remotely on some more sophisticated databases without getting some meaningless results.

The journals that were made available electronically were the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *Journal of Nursing Management*, the *American Journal of Nursing*, *International Journal of Nursing Practice* and three RCN publishing journals: *Nursing Standard*, *Nurse Researcher* and *Nursing Management*. We chose eight of the most popular and most well respected journals. We selected general journals with articles that would suit a wide variety of members and that were research-based.

We intentionally kept this project small because we wanted the service to be simple to use. We wanted to build the collection up gradually and we believed that if we over-faced our users with a huge variety of electronic journals, it could have an adverse affect and they would find it too difficult to use.

We have had the project in place now for two years. In the first year we had four journals – the four Blackwell Publishing journals – and in the second year, we doubled this to eight journals and involved another partner, Ovid. During the second year we have eliminated the need for passwords. Members still need to register for our own statistical purposes, but it is instantaneous. They don't need to remember a password and this does encourage use. In the first year the only negative feedback we had was about the password process, as this was felt to be complicated and took too long.

We wanted a seamless link between the British Nursing Index and our eight electronic journals. Right from the beginning of the project, members have been able to do a search on British Nursing Index and, where we have access to the full text, they can seamlessly go through to the full text

electronic journals. Members can still search the electronic journals separately if they would like to, as they might browse through printed journals. They can also access the Blackwell Publishing Journals through a different route, so they can go straight into the Blackwell Publishing Journals. Blackwell Publishing has created a customised welcome screen for our members that says 'Welcome to the RCN'.

For the Ovid journals and the British Nursing Index we have a concurrent user licence which was 15, but we found that that this had been exceeded and so doubled it to 30.

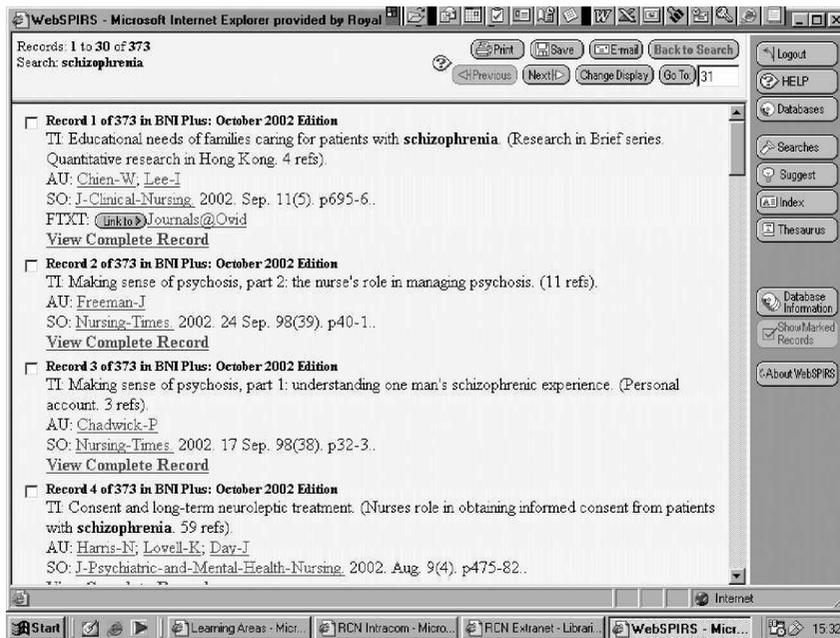
We have kept the 'help' screen very simple. We didn't want to clutter it with too much information, but there is 'help' and there are 'frequently asked questions', so members can go in to the 'help' screen or they can go in to the 'frequently asked questions' section.

This screen shot illustrates the simplicity of

colleagues within the Lifelong Learning team. The electronic journals are available at different locations on the RCN website. They are available within the Library and Information Services section, but they are also an integrated part of the RCN Learning Zone. The RCN Learning Zone is in the members' only part of the RCN website and it enables RCN members to pursue different learning opportunities. The Learning Zone includes a personal portfolio and it is very user-friendly. We believe that integration of learning and information activities is very important.

This also means that this project hasn't been promoted in isolation. The e-journals project has been promoted in its own right, but it has also been promoted as part of the RCN Learning Zone.

One of the first learning opportunities in the Learning Zone was the Library and Information

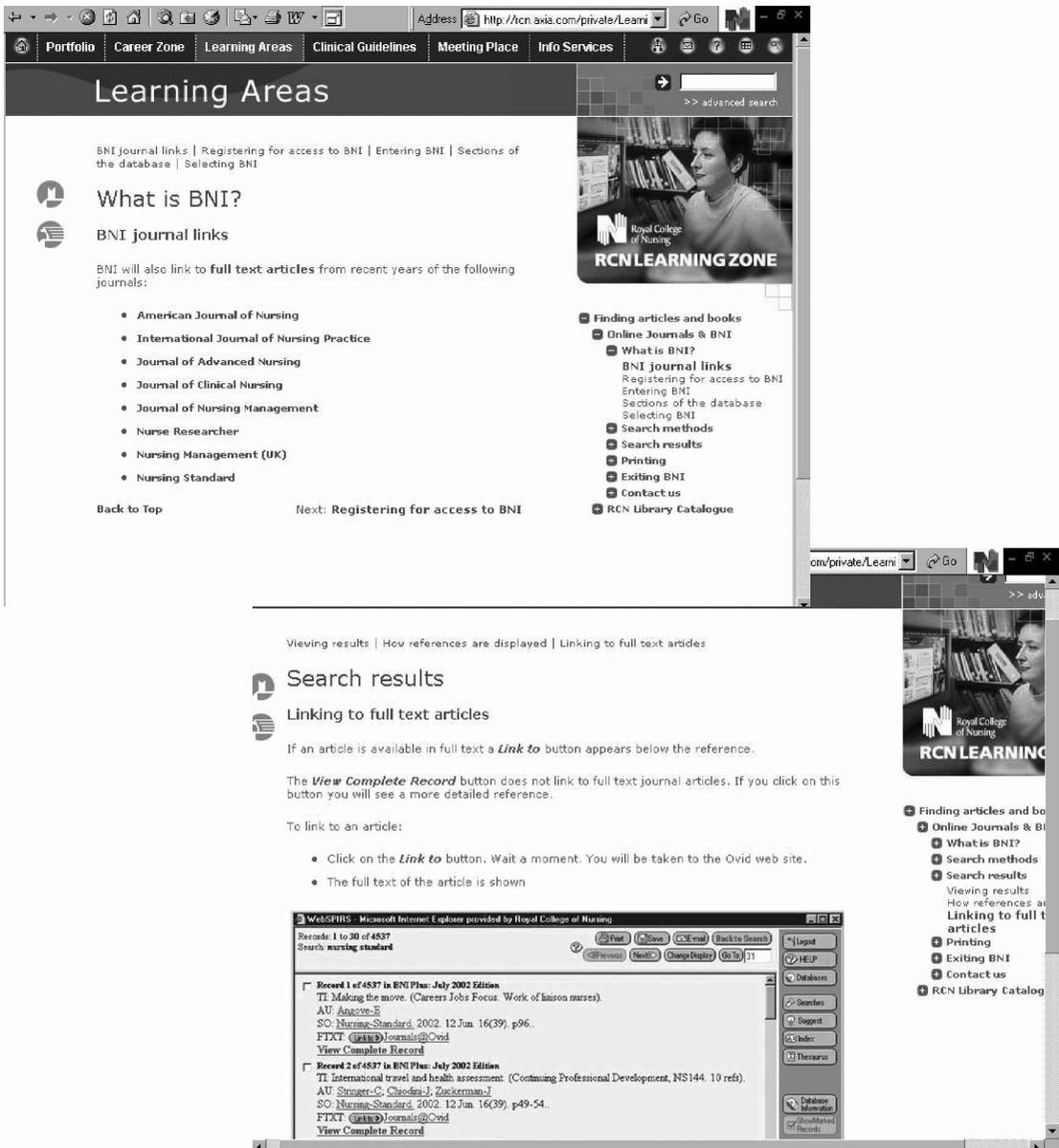


British Nursing Index : author, title, the journal reference. If we have a link to the full text, it says 'FTXT' and users click on the 'Journals@Ovid' and it takes them straight through to that particular article. We do make copyright information very clearly available .

RCN Learning Zone

Another way that we have promoted effective remote usage is to work closely with our RCN

Services Information Literacy module, which includes very practical interactive guides to finding journal articles and books. It is a very simple, but comprehensive, guide to using electronic journals and British Nursing Index. Also, within other learning opportunities in the Learning Zone, where there is a list of references and the journal article is available electronically, we include the links straight to the full text article, or to the library catalogue if there isn't a full text link available.



These illustrations are screen shots from the RCN Learning Zone and are part of our 'how to use journals and articles.' We have had recent feedback from members about clarity of language and avoidance of acronyms, and this is very important when trying to promote resources. But the Learning Zone is fairly simple and quite attractive for members to use. Library and Information Services content was used, but the experts in writing for the web helped us in organising the material on the web in a friendly way.

Training

We obtained funding from the Union Learning Fund to undertake training throughout the country. This has enabled us to provide personal training to

members within RCN Resource Centres and other places. Ovid and previous partners, Health and Communications Network, have also helped with this training. We adopted the principle of training the trainers. Within the RCN as well as traditional stewards, we have RCN Learning Representatives. Rather than supporting members with trade union activities, these volunteers support members with continuing professional development. We have had a programme which trains these Learning Representatives so that they can go back and train members in their own patch.

Promotion

As well as promoting the journals through the web environment – keeping it very simple, making the

journals available in as many places on the website as possible, producing online help guides – we promoted the service in a more traditional way. We put on a lot of fringe events at RCN conferences, the RCN Congress and the Annual General Meeting. We always ensure that the service is promoted at the cybercafé at different RCN conferences.

Our marketing department has helped us to design leaflets and mousemats. We wrote articles about the new service in the RCN membership magazine, and produced a video that won an award from the Library Association in 2001. The aim of the video was to encourage members who lacked confidence in using the internet. It gave them a taster of what they might find and how they might go about using some of these new resources. This has proved very popular and we have produced lots of copies and again, the information was cascaded to different groups within the RCN.

Has the new service been promoted effectively?

The service has been up and running now for 18 months. We are into our second year and the usage is increasing all the time. Between May and November 2002 another 8,000 members registered for the service. We now have about 25,000 members who are registered for the service and the rate is still about 1,000 new registrations per month. The RCN is finding that it is an important recruitment tool, so it has been very useful for the profile of Library and Information Services. Of all registered e-journals users we have about 25% who are active users.

Geographically, RCN members are placed across the UK. Most of the usage is from London, then the Northwest of England, the Southwest of

England, Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and then Eastern England. 80% of the usage is in England, 11% Scotland, 8% Wales and 3% Northern Ireland, and this does in fact reflect the pattern of RCN membership. The poor uptake in Northern Ireland coincided with the librarian in Northern Ireland having to take extended leave. This reinforced for us the importance that the librarians have in promoting the service to members and how effective the training sessions have been. RCN Scotland really worked hard on promoting the electronic service and that has been reflected in the take up among their members.

What's next?

We haven't yet analysed a detailed survey of feedback from our users, so we don't yet have a profile of the type of members using the service or how easy they are finding it to use. However, a survey was due to take place in February 2003 in conjunction with our marketing department, and the results of this should be available soon. We do have our usage statistics and we have had a lot of informal feedback which has been positive.

We will continue to build the service and we believe we were right to keep it small and build gradually. We will add to the number of journals and we are also going to continue to improve...

Jackie Lord, Head of Library and Information Services, Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN, England
Tel.: 44 (0) 20 7409 3333
Fax: 44 (0) 20 7647 3458
E-mail: jackie.lord@RCN.org.uk
