

using computer terminal, modem and telephone. A range of databases can be tapped providing immediate feed-back. This is sophisticated and obviously saves time in giving a quick response and allowing the searcher to discount irrelevant lines and pursue more fruitful ones. MEDLINE is an example and is part of the British Library's centrally held database. MEDLINE covers references to articles taken from an international range of over 3,000 journals in the field of medicine. It is updated monthly and because of its size, only the current year and preceding four years are available online. Offline computer searching is handled by the Lending Division of the British Library. Staff will search the MEDLINE files on your behalf and post the results to you. The RSM has access to MEDLINE, and does over 600 searches a year using it. In contrast, about 380 searches are done manually. The RCGP does not use MEDLINE, but the RCOG is about to install the necessary hardware. At present, the RCOG does about 120 searches a year.

Educational facilities, such as tapes and slides are patchy and reflect trainees' enthusiasms and demands. In our College there is much emphasis on local facilities and this is encouraged by the College Approval visits. Another attractive idea is setting up a research register, which allows anyone to know of research projects being undertaken in various parts of the country.

Our specialty perhaps more than any other is open to political and social pressures. So our librarian should be

scrutinizing daily papers and lay journals, extracting relevant information from them. She does, in fact, scan *The Times* each day. The RCOG employs a press agency to do searches on their subject, but in psychiatry the range of subjects is so broad that an informed searcher is probably better. It would also be efficient for the library to retain copies of our committees' deliberations and reports. Equally important is the retention of DHSS publications and the reports of public inquiries into psychiatric services. The librarian is also keeping folders for press cuttings on current problems.

The particular pattern of a library depends on the history of its College and the needs of the members. A survey of trainees, done by Clare and Lucas some years ago, found that the majority wanted a photocopying and bibliographic service. A loan library was a clear second choice, but that may have altered, in that trainees are expected to have adequate local library book facilities. Perhaps more importantly, a College librarian can advise trainees on searching from references for a research project and how to obtain the more esoteric journals and books. One hopes that eventually the provision of searches and reference lists will be part of our College library service.

Meanwhile our Library's setting is a congenial and attractive room where browsing amongst books is a pleasure. That, too, is important and it is now a matter of how to extend the facilities further.

Using Library Resources

FIONA MACKAY PICKEN, Regional Librarian, N. W. Thames Regional Health Authority

The whole object of using a library is to obtain wanted material and information. Libraries are in a constant state of evolution, and local facilities have improved, in some cases dramatically, but on the whole the situation is still far from adequate.

If one looks specifically at psychiatric coverage, there are several types of access points, each having advantages but also presenting problems. Psychiatrists in a teaching hospital have access to a library staffed by professional librarians who possess in-depth skills in relation to automated information, retrieval, classification, outside sources, and so on. On the other hand, such a library has to cover around 35 disciplines in medicine, only one of which is psychiatry. This itself has important sub-divisions—child psychiatry, psychoanalysis, etc—so on the whole the coverage of books and journals is likely to be less than in the libraries of psychiatric hospitals.

These themselves differ, encompassing the various sub-specialties. The staff ratio may be very low in these hospitals, and this makes it difficult to justify the employment of a qualified librarian, even in a part-time capacity, when the

medical staff may number no more than ten. This, of course, strengthens the case for a multi-user library with a multi-disciplinary stock. However inadequate the staffing here, the stock is often quite reasonable as it is specific to a relatively narrow field, but at the same time there are often problems relating to obtaining material not held.

One of the most recent developments which has profoundly affected library provision over the last decade has been the creation of posts of Regional Librarian. Out of the 15 National Health Service Regions in England and Wales, at this moment six have full-time Regional Librarians (the four Thames Regions, Wessex and Oxford), and apart from the South West and Trent Regions which have no Regional system at all, all the rest have varying degrees of coverage. The role of the Regional Librarian is to co-ordinate all library activity within postgraduate centre libraries and foster co-operation with medical and other libraries, with the object of creating a network capable of supporting the demands of the readership at whatever level is required. For example, by grouping libraries in Districts it has been possible to appoint a qualified experienced medical

librarian who will supervise directly or indirectly all the libraries in that District. Thus a small psychiatric hospital can directly benefit from the skills of the District Librarian. Within the four Thames Regions it is hoped to establish inter-Regional links between the psychiatric libraries. The Regional Librarians have formed themselves into a Group—the NHS Regional Librarians Group—which meets regularly and pursues matters on a national basis.*

If one turns now to what readers usually want from libraries, they have been grouped as follows: (i) books—especially advanced textbooks for higher exams and also teaching; (ii) keeping up to date; (iii) clinical problems; (iv) research needs; and (v) general enquiries.

Books

Advanced textbooks often create one of the most acute problems, as those who want them are taking the same examinations and so want them at once. It is reasonable to expect a library to have a basic selection, but this is often inadequate within the sub-specialities. Some libraries supplement their books stock by having subscriptions to a lending library, such as H. K. Lewis or Ferriers. Indeed, it is worth while for individual readers engaged in examination study to take out their own subscription (1981 cost about £8 p.a.) and this usually ensures they are able to obtain books when needed, and they can be retained as long as wanted. Books wanted for shorter periods can be obtained by the librarian on inter-library loan, using the knowledge of outside resources and the available networks.

For teaching purposes many libraries will be prepared to put recommended books on limited issue, but it is important that the librarian is given sufficient warning so that these can be acquired in time.

The same can be applied to lists of references which are recommended course reading. Photocopies are obtained and issued in the same way as books. This has several advantages, in that if the course is repeated each year, although some references will be deleted and fresh ones added, there will be a core already available, which saves costs and time.

Keeping up to date

The most common method is regular scanning of relevant current journals, and all libraries should have a reasonable selection available. If the library is part of a developed network it can in fact subscribe to less than those still in isolation, the reason being that there will be easy access to libraries holdings. Those libraries in a Regional system are likely to have a Union List of Periodicals which says which

titles are located where. This should be available for consultation in every library in the system. Within the four Thames Regions, discussions are at present taking place regarding the feasibility of having an inter-regional list of psychiatric journals. This would have the effect of increasing the coverage and making virtually all the psychiatric journals available to all working in the Thames Regions through their hospital librarian.

Clinical problems

Libraries should contain the necessary bibliographies which give access to a much wider range of literature than any one library can expect to hold. The use of these bibliographies is often not straightforward, and it is wise to ask the librarian for assistance as it is their job to know their way through these complexities and in addition they can often recommend further sources. As psychiatric patients often have concomitant physical illnesses, the main bibliography of medicine *Index Medicus* should also be in every psychiatric library, especially as the general medical book and journal stock is unlikely to be extensive.

Research needs

For those with specific or research interests it is possible to get a monthly computer print-out of directly relevant references. For both this and clinical problems an individual computer search may be most relevant, as it is not recommended that extensive investment of time and money should be expended without first finding out what others have done in the field. Estimates vary, but there is evidence to show an unacceptably high level of duplication of research; work is constantly being undertaken which would not have if the researcher had been better informed. (Availability of these services varies from Region to Region, but by contacting the appropriate Regional Librarian, details can be supplied.)

General enquiries

A library should be considered not only as a repository of actual books and journals, but through the librarian, as a source of information on a national and international scale. To illustrate this, one recent trend has been the development of what is called patient information services, and the establishment of Groups or Clubs to assist not only patients suffering from a particular disease but also their relatives who may have to cope with, say, schizophrenia, senility and so on. A research project to identify and collate all such Groups has proved so successful that it is being continued as a service. It is called 'Help for Health', and information on relevant Groups is available from the Wessex Regional Library Service at Southampton General Hospital. A similar booklet has been available for some time called 'Help, I need Somebody' compiled by the librarian at the Lister Hospital, Stevenage.

*Details of individual members of the Group and the Regions they cover will gladly be given. The address: Miss F. M. Picken, Regional Librarian, c/o Postgraduate Medical Centre, Charing Cross Hospital, Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8RF.

Conclusion

To bring libraries up to the standard necessary to support the needs of those working in hospitals requires a constant and sustained effort. The development of Regional Library systems has already shown the marked difference between those libraries within such a system and the fragmentation and waste of resources in those Regions that do not have Regional coverage. This work should not be one-sided, though, and all librarians, whether local or Regional, have the case for these essential improvements greatly strengthened if the demand comes equally from the users. If a librarian is trying to persuade the Administrators of the need for additional resources, the stock reply is often that there have been no complaints or demands. It is in the

interests of all users to press for better facilities, and psychiatrists are more fortunate than most in that the College's Approval Teams are laying more and more emphasis on adequate library facilities being an important criterion for recognition.

Active co-operation is at present taking place between the Regional Librarians Group and the Royal College of Psychiatrists to try to devise a standard method of assessing the adequacy or otherwise of a library.

It is realized that overnight transformation is impossible, but if all those who need and use library and information services keep up steady and unrelenting pressure, progress can be made.

The Policy of the College Library

HENRY R. ROLLIN, Honorary Librarian, Royal College of Psychiatrists

The role of the College library has hitherto not been defined. This is perhaps to be explained by the fact that, prior to our translation to 17 Belgrave Square, there has never been a library in the sense of a room or rooms exclusively given over to its use. An equal, if not more serious handicap, was the lack of the services of a professional librarian. Now these difficulties have been overcome. We have an elegant, well-appointed room in which to do our job and the work of our newly-appointed librarian, Mrs Susan Floate, cannot be too highly praised.

For the first time, therefore, we are in a position to frame a policy and it is as well to this end to be realistic and to appreciate what we cannot do. Thus:

- (i) We cannot provide total library facilities in the way that the RSM does.
- (ii) We cannot offer a comprehensive journal service, and with the services of the British Library Lending Division so readily available, it would be foolish to even try.

What we can do, however, is:

- (i) To make what books, journals and memorabilia that we have readily available to the membership and to other *bona fide* scholars. With this in view, the library

has been so designed and furnished as to provide comfortable chairs and tables at which to work.

- (ii) Within certain limits, to loan books to members; but the prohibitive cost now makes a postal service impossible. For very obvious reasons our valuable antiquarian books cannot be loaned.
- (iii) To answer enquiries by telephone—it should be noted that in this respect business is already brisk.
- (iv) To collect and catalogue the memoranda and other documents issued by the College.
- (v) To continue to collect books on psychiatry—modern, antiquarian and covering the history of the specialty. It is imperative at this point to express our thanks to members who have so generously donated copies of their works to the Library.
- (vi) To expand the classification, cataloguing and indexing of the collection.

But when all is said and done, the Library is there to serve the membership and we would welcome suggestions that would make us more efficient. A library is a vital artery in the body-politic of a College such as ours. It is for the members to keep their fingers on the pulse of that artery, and should they note any irregularities in its rate or volume, to take steps to ensure a speedy return to healthy action.