

This month, Catherine Ebenezer describes a day in her life as information systems manager in the RCM library – a day that sees her responding to requests for hard-to-find information as well as getting on her bike to pick up free journals.

An informative day

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RCM information systems manager Catherine Ebenezer works in the College’s library department, which is based on Portland Place in London.

As she explains here, her working day can include anything from upgrading library systems to answering detailed research queries.

Circulars, journals and backups

‘I arrive at Westcott House at 9:18 after a 40-minute bicycle ride. My colleague Nurun is already at her desk, and greets me with the offer of a cup of tea – what a star!

‘At 9:27, I log in to my computer to read the email that has arrived since yesterday morning. There are 39 new messages awaiting my attention.

Quite a few are circulars – I subscribe to a large number of mailing lists and newsletters to do with information services, web design and information technology. I skim them quickly, sending any particularly useful-looking articles to my home email to read later. Librarians are keen correspondents on mailing lists, and use them a great deal to comment on issues and to ask for help or information.

‘Today, a local NHS librarian is offering duplicate issues of the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* and I contact her straight away to snap them up. It turns out that I shall have to collect them on my bicycle, as the hospital post room is ‘no good at parcels’. Another librarian is going to Uganda and wants journals and books to take with her.

‘One researcher asks if we hold any archival records relating to midwifery in the Western Isles, Scotland. I reply in the negative, but refer her to the RCN archives in Edinburgh. I also suggest that she tries using Archon (the National Archives directory) and the Archives Hub service.

‘I am due to upgrade the library system to a new version, a task that I have been meaning to do for several weeks, so I create a backup of the entire directory in preparation.’

Covering books, searching for answers

‘At midday, I go up to the library to provide cover during the lunch hour. I have been doing this regularly while the College librarian Mary Dharmachandran is on holiday. It is quiet, so I sit at the issue desk and apply myself to updating the library web pages. Some of them, e.g. the current awareness and statistics pages, have a great many external links that need to be checked regularly to ensure they still work.

‘Belinda, the library assistant, returns from her break at 1:05. I go downstairs and have my lunch sitting at my desk.

‘At 2:50, I am summoned by Belinda to help with an awkward search. The reader needs to find information on the cultural barriers to accessing antenatal care that can be experienced by minority ethnic women. I try a series of complex search strategies in our bibliographic databases, but cannot seem to find much that she has not already seen, other than a 1995 King’s Fund study of Bangladeshi women in Pollokshields, Glasgow.

‘I return briefly to my emails at 3:35.

There is some discussion of dates and venues for a meeting of the London health libraries knowledge and skills development sub-group.

I am asked to comment on the final text of an e-learning proposal, and a colleague has written to ask me to add some information to a project web page for which she is responsible.

‘It is time to cover the library again at 4:00. Another student midwife is in difficulty with a search on dietary sources of iron to recommend to pregnant women. It is difficult to find material that answers her specific question. I attempt an explanation of granularity and specificity in indexing, and how key word indexes are taken only from abstracts, not the full text of an article. The articles I find are mostly in nutrition and nursing journals that we do not hold. She is very disappointed, but I print out the full search for her anyway and ask her to take it away to look at the results.

‘At 5:00, I close the library and am able to return downstairs – back to the email, and a feeble attempt to tidy my desk before heading home at 5:35.’

