



Editorial

Waiting for Evidence

Alison Brettle
Editor-in-Chief
Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing Midwifery and Social Work
University of Salford
Salford, United Kingdom
Email: a.brettle@salford.ac.uk

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As library practitioners we may often want evidence to help us make decisions or to provide a rationale for what we do. We may then get frustrated that the research evidence doesn't exist or doesn't quite match our needs. This occurred to me when reading recent articles about searching in relation to systematic reviews (e.g., Gehanno, et al., 2013; Nourbakhsh, et al., 2012) which in turn reminded me of one of my first forays into evidence based librarianship. I was working on a project investigating the feasibility of undertaking systematic reviews in social care (Long et al., 2002a; 2002b) and one of my roles was to identify a set of "best" databases for searching in this field (Brettle & Long, 2001). I soon realised not only that this was a difficult task, but that one of the differences between evidence based practice in social care and evidence based practice in medicine (whose practice we were emulating) is that the questions, the answers, and the evidence needed to obtain those answers are all more messy or fuzzy than a clinical question which can be broken down by PICO (Richardson et al., 1995). The overall conclusion of the social

care project was that, despite this messiness and fuzziness, it was still possible to adopt a systematic approach and to identify "best" evidence (Long et al, 2002a) and thus to undertake evidence based social care.

The same can be said about evidence based library and information practice; the interventions that we are involved in and the decisions we make often don't involve cause and effect, and because of this there won't be a clear-cut answer. This doesn't mean there is no evidence or that we can't be evidence based; it's just that the medical hierarchy of evidence (Guyatt et al., 1995) doesn't fit, a point also made by Crumley and Koufogiannakis (2002). As in social care, we need to ensure that our view of evidence is a broad one but as my recent reading on systematic reviews suggests, we also need to be patient in waiting for answers. We need to think about building up a picture of evidence for our practice rather than hoping (or expecting) that one piece of research will provide the answers we need. My research into databases, mentioned earlier, seemed to throw up more research questions

than I answered. I was able to provide an answer for a very specific topic but this couldn't be generalised for all topics or all databases, so it didn't help me a great deal in further searches or in teaching information literacy. My recent reading provides additional pieces of evidence about when certain resources are more appropriate than others, as well as generating a number of questions regarding methodology. This incomplete picture of evidence is good news – it gives practitioner researchers working in library and information practice plenty of questions to investigate, which will ultimately generate a better overall picture of evidence.

This March issue of EBLIP contains a wide variety of research articles, evidence summaries, reviews and commentaries. I hope it helps you build up a useful picture of the evidence you need for your practice.

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