

# Should hospices further utilise information specialists to support the digital literacy of staff and volunteers?



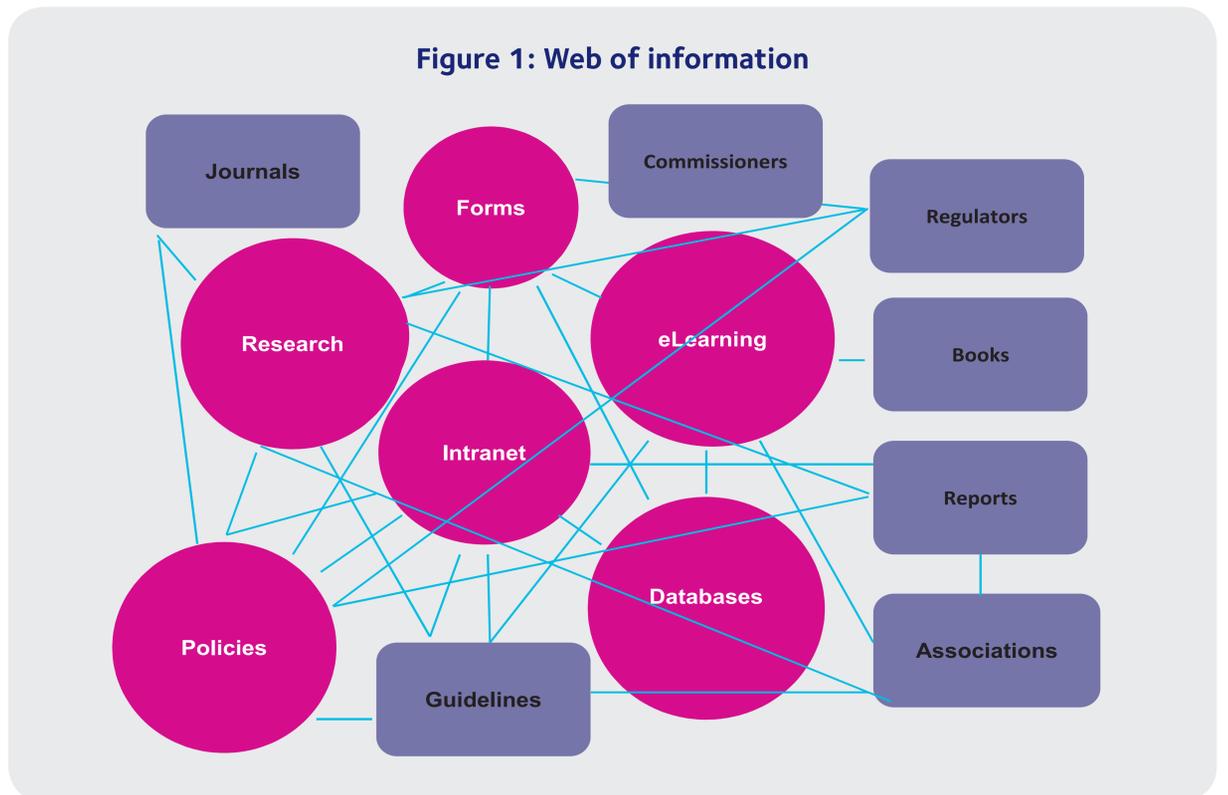
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## Background

According to a recent survey of hospices, just 15% have a paid librarian in post<sup>1</sup>. This figure was derived from a whole sample survey of 220 hospices with a response rate of 30%. If we assume that the non-respondents do not have an information professional in post, the percentage would fall to 5%. Wherever the true figure lies, it is clear that librarians are a rarity in hospices.

Despite the lack of dedicated information support, health and social care professionals are required to navigate a highly complex web of information (figure 1). At Princess Alice Hospice there are local policies, forms, databases, intranets, eLearning systems and shared document drives, all with a different information architecture, sometimes password-protected, and sometimes not.

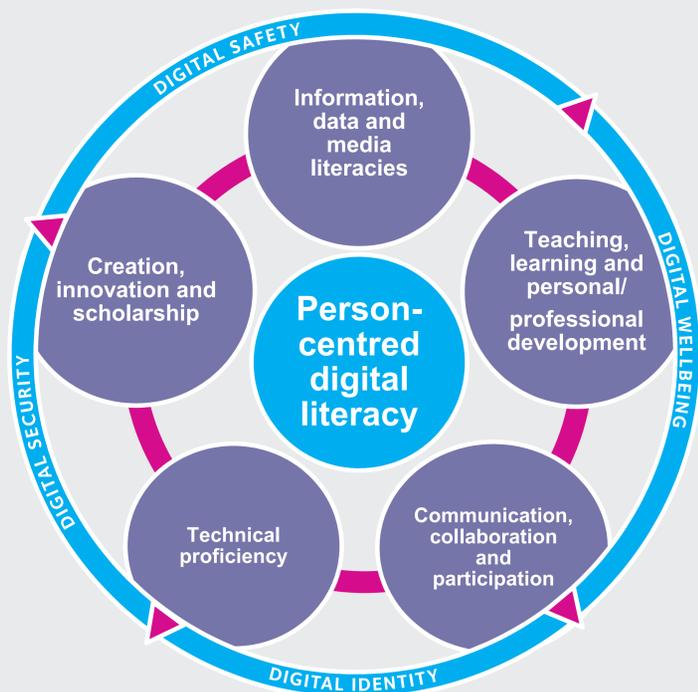
This is just the tip of the information iceberg; there are also national clinical guidelines, publications from a multitude of associations / regulators / commissioners, not to mention books, eBooks and journal articles. The journal database Medline, part of Pubmed, is getting close to indexing a million journal articles a year<sup>2</sup> – that is two articles per minute, more than any one person could hope to review, recall and retain. Staying abreast of relevant evidence and being able to find information efficiently is a challenge that is only going to get bigger as more and more information is published.



There are also wider issues to address – the Royal College of Nursing<sup>3</sup>, in conjunction with Health Education England, recently published their “Improving Digital Literacy” report which recognises that:

**“The effective use of information and digital technologies is a key enabler in delivering health and social care now and in the future. The impact of technology and the potential that it has to transform care is a professional issue touching on care delivery, practice, education and research<sup>3</sup>.”**

Figure 2: Development areas for digital literacy



Adapted from Jisc Digital Capacity Framework (2015)  
<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/quides/developing-digital-literacies>

## Aim:

To build a hospice workforce that can confidently navigate through multiple digital systems, search efficiently for relevant information and value knowledge sharing behaviours.

## Proposal:

Librarians and information professionals are well-placed to engage with health and social care professionals and have the specialist expertise to facilitate the development of digital literacy skills while providing:

- Information orientation at induction
- Database search training
- Literature searching
- Evidence reviews
- ICT support
- Knowledge management
- Academic and research support

## Recommendations

The RCN and Health Education England identify several development areas for digital literacy (see figure 2). These areas can be further developed by the services and support currently provided by information professionals in hospices, facilitating the journey towards a more digitally literate workforce. Hospices without specialist information support should consider the value a paid professional could contribute to the organisation's strategic objectives.

Any librarians, educators or education administrators interested in how libraries and information professionals operate in hospices are welcome to join the Libraries in Hospices Network<sup>4</sup>, which meets several times a year to discuss best practice, new initiatives and share expertise.

## References

1. Tuck J, Langley S, Brady D, Hodson M (2016). Hospice library services: much more than a library space. Liverpool: Hospice UK Conference 2016.
2. US National Library of Medicine (2017). Key MEDLINE® Indicators [ONLINE]. Available at: [https://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/bsd\\_key.html](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/bsd_key.html) [Accessed 20-Sep-17]
3. Royal College of Nursing (2017). Improving Digital Literacy. London: Royal College of Nursing. Available at: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-006129> [Accessed 20-Nov-17]
4. Libraries in Hospices Network. For more information contact Sue Langley, Library & Information Services Manager, East Anglia's Children's Hospices (EACH).