

## Embedded Knowledge and Library Specialist Roles within Primary Care Training Hubs: Summary of the final evaluation, July 2024

View the [full evaluation report](#)

**Challenge:** According to [Next Steps for the 5 Year Forward View](#), 93% patient consultations take place in primary care. Despite this, staff working in primary care have had limited access to NHS knowledge and library services and limited time to undertake in-depth searches of research evidence to inform their decisions. Health Education England, now NHS England, ran a proof-of-concept study with funding for 2 years to explore the impact upon primary care of placing an embedded librarian and knowledge specialist in 15 Primary Care Training Hubs across England.

**Key findings:** The introduction of embedded librarian knowledge specialist roles has improved equity of access to evidence and knowledge for a wide range of staff and learners working in primary care and ICBs at the selected project sites. They have delivered numerous benefits linked to the priorities of Primary Care Training Hubs, ICBs and the wider NHS. These roles have underpinned the education and training experience of staff but also led to improvements in using evidence from research to make informed evidence-based decisions about patient care and service delivery.

If the **1:3.85** cost benefit ratio is applied, the pilot delivered a net economic benefit to the NHS of at least **£2,351,250** per annum. If there was a minimum of 1 embedded knowledge specialist in each of the 42 integrated care systems in England, to meet the evidence and knowledge needs of primary care and ICB staff, this would lead to a net economic benefit for the NHS of at least **£6,583,500** per annum.

**Outcomes:** The pilot ended September 2023. 9 services succeeded in securing a degree of local funding to continue for a fixed term. The remaining 6 have stepped down the embedded service. 1 new service was established. Access to the nationally procured collection of digital knowledge resources remains in place for all primary care and ICB staff and learners. Learning from the pilot can be applied to efficiently enable the primary care workforce and ICB staff to maximise use of evidence and knowledge as provided by NHS librarian knowledge specialists.

The following recommendations are based on this evaluation:

1. ICB leaders, clinical specialists and knowledge service teams work together to advocate for the benefits, positive impact and value of NHS knowledge specialists working in primary care.
2. Primary Care Clinical Directors are asked to consider how well they and their staff are using evidence and knowledge to inform their decisions?
3. Primary Care Leaders are asked to promote digital knowledge resources including BMJ Best Practice, the national clinical decision support tool, and to work closely with their local NHS knowledge and library services.
4. At least one dedicated librarian/ knowledge specialist is appointed into each primary care hub to underpin the use of evidence, upskill teams to use digital knowledge resources and facilitate knowledge sharing to inform productivity and innovation. ICBs and Primary Care Networks are invited to work with the local knowledge service as part of their workforce planning.
5. NHS organisations to work with NHS England and local services to review funding arrangements, ensuring equitable provision of high-quality knowledge and library services.

### Patient Outcomes / Enhancing experience of care

Sourcing and summarising **research evidence** to inform patient care, service redesign, service priorities education and research.

Effective facilitation to share best practice, know-how, managing knowledge.



Equivalent of **897** working days saved by knowledge specialists undertaking searches

Clinicians' time released back for direct patient care.

Keeping the whole primary care and ICB workforce updated about the latest evidence and trends in healthcare via tailored horizon scanning alerts.

### Staff experience

**678**  
Sessions delivered

Education sessions to upskill workforce in digital literacy, study and search skills training.

Research skills support for Fellows.

Awareness of health literacy techniques for good health conversations with patients/clients.



**5383** People receiving information skills training

**2481**  
Resource enquiries

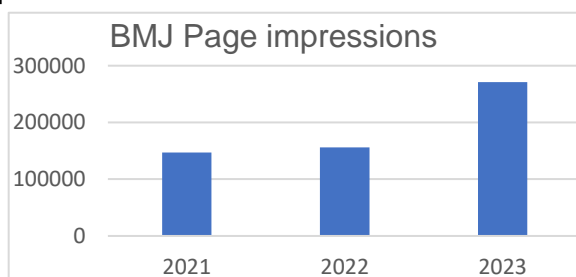
Interacting with all roles working across primary and integrated care. Improved access to high-quality research evidence via promotion of centrally purchased digital resources.

### Value for money

**1357**  
Articles supplied

Direct supply of books and articles to the primary care workforce - no additional fees.

Maximise value of centrally purchased digital knowledge collection including clinical decision support tool. During pilot, use of centrally purchased resources increased due to the work of knowledge specialists providing training and ongoing promotion.



An investment of **55K** p.a. per training hub results in a **73k** net economic benefit.

### Benefits

- ✓ Saving staff time.
- ✓ Improving patient care.
- ✓ Supporting staff recruitment, retention and wellbeing.
- ✓ Enabling informed decision-making. based on research evidence.
- ✓ Meeting statutory requirement to use and promote evidence from research.
- ✓ Avoids unnecessary duplication and waste.
- ✓ Is inclusive and enables equity of access.

“It is likely that if the knowledge specialist’s expertise had not been available, we would have bought in external expertise, e.g. from Imperial Health Partners. The programme would not have been underpinned by sound evidence, or it would have been sourced at higher cost. The time of senior managers would have been consumed in performing literature searches they were not highly competent to undertake, and therefore would likely have been sub-optimal.” **Michael Bainbridge – Associate Director of Primary Care (Strategy).**

### Impact Case Study: Evidence supplied helped a patient make an informed choice

**Reason for enquiry:** A patient was concerned that continued use of their steroid inhaler would lead to further cataracts.

**What did the knowledge and library specialist do?** The Primary Care Knowledge Specialist searched and compiled a digest on the topic “inhaled corticosteroids and incidence of cataracts.”

**Impact:** The information helped the patient to understand that the use of the steroid inhaler was safe. The search saved 2 hours of clinical time and avoided the risk of a future hospital admission through stopping steroid inhaler treatment.

“it helped the patient to make a decision. It helped us to support the patient to make a good decision. We put the information you sent to us on to the patient’s record so it would help any of the nurses or doctors when they do an asthma review, they will have that information to look back on.

“it just felt like such a relief that we had somebody to ask because we are so stretched in primary care at the moment. Having a library service is really valuable because these queries can be really time consuming and it’s really stressful when you know that you should look into it but you don’t have the time...The staff in primary care are at their limit and knowing there are people that can support them with these complex queries is great.”

**Jennifer Low, Lead Primary Care Network Pharmacist, Desborough Surgery, High Wycombe**



Evidence Librarians informing decision-making in primary care




### Launching a Leg Club

**East Guildford PCN Manager asked the Evidence Librarian** to identify and summarise relevant evidence on the Leg Club model. The evidence was used to support a business case for funding from the Better Care Fund and to inform the delivery of a Leg Club in East Guildford.

**What was the impact?** The Leg Club model will save the PCN a huge amount of money in clinical costs. It will improve social isolation and loneliness in the cohort of people experiencing lower limb wounds. There is also evidence to show the healing rate is quicker and more sustainable when patients attend a leg club.

*Kayleigh Moyse  
East Guildford PCN manager*



Find out more by contacting the  
National NHS Knowledge and Library Services Team  
England.kfh@nhs.net

[Promotional flyer and webpage of library resources for GP and practice staff.](#)

You can read more about our work in [Knowledge for Healthcare: Mobilising evidence; sharing knowledge; improving outcomes](#) and visiting [www.library.nhs.uk](http://www.library.nhs.uk)