How the web portal NHS Evidence will help nurses to make informed decisions

Exploring how nurses can make the most of the recently launched online portal NHS Evidence, and its relevance to daily clinical practice

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NHS Evidence, launched in April 2009, allows everyone in health and social care to access the latest clinical and non-clinical evidence and best practice, to help them make informed decisions. This article outlines how nurses can make best use of the service and explains its features. From October, one of these is helping users to identify the best evidence by awarding an accreditation mark to the most reliable sources of guidance.

INTRODUCTION

NHS Evidence is an internet-based service which aims to help those working in health and social care to make informed decisions about treatments and resources, by providing easy and rapid access to the best clinical and non-clinical evidence as well as best practice information.

Until now, finding relevant and reliable information has been complex and time-consuming, which has been problematic, particularly for specialist nurses and those involved in training and policymaking.

NHS Evidence makes researching a wide range of issues – including patient care, commissioning and service management – significantly easier. It also quality assesses the organisations that produce guidance and recommendations for practice.

It is as easy to use as popular search engines such as Google, but can be used with the confidence that it will only return relevant results from credible sources.

CHANGING PRACTICE IN ASSESSING INFORMATION

Most nurses come into the profession with the motivation to provide excellent care, both medically and compassionately. However, the demands of the job sometimes make this feel impossible. Healthcare is changing rapidly and, with the volume of medical research substantially increasing, trying to keep up to date with all the latest developments can feel overwhelming.

After a 12-hour shift on a busy ward, probably the last thing any nurse wants to do is to read a medical paper that may or may not be relevant to their daily work.

But while keeping up to date is challenging, it is also necessary if we are to deliver the highest possible care.

For the majority of healthcare professionals, who do not have time to review all relevant new publications, a facility to help highlight important new information is essential.

NHS Evidence is due to provide a regular alert system through RSS feeds and put this in context for users at the next major update of the service in October. Context is important because new evidence is much more likely to add weight to the existing evidence base, rather than challenge or overturn current practice.

NHS Evidence highlights significant new information on a monthly basis, in context, via an electronic bulletin, Eyes on Evidence – to which subscription is free via the portal, and annually through annual evidence updates in key topic areas.

This work is supported by 34 specialist collections which make up the NHS Evidence Health Information Resources, available via the portal. The collections filter the huge quantity of published research, identify relevant sources of information and review new publications.

HOW IT WORKS

In many ways, NHS Evidence is a one stop shop for all the best and most up-to-date information on health and social care. However, most of the content is not stored on the site and in this sense it is much more than just a new website.

The search engine directs users to information from a range of sources, split into six interest areas: clinical research; commissioning; drugs and technologies; public health; social care; and education and learning tools.

It is designed to look simple and user-friendly, like other popular search engines. However, because of its specialist nature, it has an added degree of complexity to ensure users get the most out of it.

NHS Evidence has a vast number of features. One of its main advances on other search engines is in the way it rapidly filters results, allowing users to refine them further using a navigation menu into topic areas, such as clinical or drugs and technologies.

Results can be displayed by relevance or date of publication and shared easily via email.

As with all new technology, learning a few simple techniques can greatly improve the benefits, both in terms of speed and in more refined, specialist searching. The NHS Evidence Introductory Guide to Searching can be found on the site under the drop-down menus ‘About us’ and ‘Search tips’. For tips on filtering a search, see Box 1.
**INSTILLING USER CONFIDENCE**

One of the core benefits of NHS Evidence is the development of the first evidence accreditation scheme, due to be launched in October. This will help instil user confidence in the value and integrity of information by accrediting the sources.

It is not the information itself that is assessed but the processes used to develop it. Therefore, it is the organisations that produce information which are accredited.

NHS Evidence will award an accreditation mark to guidance producers that show compliance with a defined set of criteria that reflect the processes used to develop their products. These criteria are based on international standards for guideline development produced by the AGREE Collaboration (appraisal of guidelines and research evaluation). For example, an accredited organisation that produces lots of information of different types – guidelines on different topics as well as clinical summaries – can add the accreditation mark to all its guidance.

Users, in turn, see this mark when they search for information through NHS Evidence, with accredited providers listed at the top of search results and flagged up with the accreditation mark.

Only selected sources available through NHS Evidence that meet the criteria will be accredited.

It is hoped the process will significantly improve the quality of information that is available to healthcare professionals and, in time, more groups are expected to achieve these high standards.

**CLINICAL IMPLEMENTATION**

As nursing continues to change, most nurses will find information on NHS Evidence that will benefit aspects of their working life significantly.

Currently, most nurses stay updated either by attending or running training sessions. NHS Evidence can help with producing training materials because those organising a session can quickly search for and find the latest information, including whether NICE has provided guidance on the topic.

This kind of information is also invaluable to specialist nurses – for example, in areas such as diabetes, where much new guidance is being produced. Rather than clinical leads trying to raise awareness of new guidance and putting together a presentation for staff, information is already available through NHS Evidence in a user-friendly form.

The service is also supporting a range of activities designed to encourage changes in practice – as well as providing ready access to information through the online portal. It seeks to promote the use of evidence across healthcare.

From October, NHS Evidence will allow users to personalise the online portal to facilitate specific updating mechanisms and to tailor searches to make them more effective. To ensure the service remains useful in a rapidly changing online world, regular feedback from users will be gathered for review and continuous improvement.

While NHS Direct and NHS Choices will remain the first point of contact for the public, NHS Evidence is available to anyone with access to the internet.

**CONCLUSION**

NHS Evidence is a new and developing service that has been designed to help make it easier to keep up to date with the latest developments in clinical and non-clinical evidence and best practice.

There are already several features that can directly benefit all nurses, particularly those working in specialist fields or involved in training and policy development. As the service moves forward, the applications for its use will increase.

By making it quicker and easier for healthcare workers to stay updated, NHS Evidence is much more than an academic exercise. It is not about taking the care out of caring — simple humanity and care will always remain the cornerstone of what clinicians do. It simply means that, when nurses do need information, their task is made much easier — they will know where to look and be able to rely on the quality of information provided.

See [www.evidence.nhs.uk](http://www.evidence.nhs.uk) for more details

**REFERENCE**