Reflections on collaborative working: Library support to clinical practice in secondary care mental health services
Tracey Pratchett & Clare Jefferson

CITATION
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE/CASE STUDIES

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Abstract
This reflective case study shows how collaborative working between the library and a community mental health team impacted upon research activities, service development and direct patient care. The Critical Incident Technique was used to explore three case studies and demonstrate impact from both perspectives.

Keywords
collaborative working; case study; reflection; practice development; library; critical incident technique

Introduction
Health libraries routinely evaluate their services to demonstrate impact on their host organisations (Brettle et al., 2011). Hence, clinical evaluation or feedback is frequently obtained via questionnaire or interviews and then synthesised by the librarian in isolation. To highlight some of the key benefits of developing a closer working relationship, we have written this article to provide a detailed example of how inter-working between library services and a community mental health team can enhance clinical practice. This article is a reflective piece, with three
brief case studies structured using the “Making Alignment a Priority for Health Libraries” (MAP) case study template (Pratchett et al., 2011). MAP is a toolkit developed by health librarians in the North West to help them align library services to NHS organisational requirements thus being evidence-based practitioners, a concept also integral to mental health practice (Spring, 2007). We also used the Critical Incident Technique, which has been used within psychology (Flanagan, 1954; Koch, Strobel, Kici & Westhoff, 2009) and library research (Lacey Bryant & Gray, 2006) to explore customer perceived value of interventions. This exploration has enabled us to evaluate Tracey’s library interventions and their impact upon Clare’s practice and we hope to draw out some implications for other practitioners based in Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Case Study 1: Research activities 16-23 July 2010

Library interventions delivered by Tracey to support Clare’s research were:

- An outreach visit – Tracey travelled to Clare’s place of work to plan a literature search, demonstrate how to access resources and to discuss requirements.
- Literature searches – two literature search digests including a full search strategy, links to full text articles and guidelines, were delivered within an agreed timescale.
- Psychology journals – a list of potential psychology journals for article submission and authors’ notes provided.

Clare’s Story

We had collected outcome data over a period of time. We really needed to analyse the data and transform the project from an ‘idea’ into ‘existence’. With a looming deadline approaching, it was vital that I reviewed the evidence relating to Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation – Outcome Measure (Evans et al., 2000) but it was difficult to find the time required to complete the searches and with reflection I was a bit concerned that I might miss something vital.

Before I met Tracey, I was not aware of the breadth of the library services available, but Tracey showed me some examples of her work and we were able to talk through the search strategy, which reassured me that nothing vital would be missed and enabled me to focus on other areas of the project. I was grateful and impressed that the searches were returned in a short timescale, which removed some of my worries around making sure literature searches were adequately planned and executed.

Tracey’s Story

When I emailed Professor Chris Hatton on 5 July 2010 to promote Cumbria-wide library services to the Barrow Research Circle, I was really pleased to hear from Clare so quickly! We set up a meeting to discuss Clare’s requirements and from my point of view that worked really well. I was able to talk through the service that we offered and show Clare examples of the kind of literature search digests we could deliver. By meeting Clare I was able to understand their research needs and we worked together to jointly formulate a literature search strategy. Because we were able to talk through different approaches and trial a few examples I think it made the end product more relevant to their needs.

Impact on Clare’s practice

Whilst the initial meeting helped me to understand the range of support provided by the library service, meeting Tracey in person reassured me that she could deliver what I needed. The literature searches were thorough and received within agreed deadlines and meant that I was confident that we hadn’t missed any vital evidence. This support has helped me to fulfil one of my professional development competencies relating to research activity (Jefferson & Wadham, 2010) and has also improved my literature searching ability.

Case Study 2: Service and role development 22 July – 15 August 2010

Library interventions delivered to support Clare’s service and role development:

- 18 literature search digests were delivered including a range of full text/abstract links for a range of document types.

Clare’s Story

I had recently changed jobs within the Trust and there were a number of priorities that I was focussed on relating to client care and service development. It was essential that I had the most recent policies, guidelines and research evidence and as Tracey had been able to assist me with my research requests earlier in the month, I wondered whether she could help and so sent her my list of topic areas. Using email, we prioritised the list and combined some topics where there appeared to be overlap and was impressed that Tracey and the team managed to turn these around in a short space of time.
Reflections on collaborative working: Library support to clinical practice

**Tracey’s Story**
When I received Clare’s email shortly after our first contact I was really pleased that she contacted us for this information. Then I read her email with its 33 literature search requests and thought ‘yikes!’ I was a bit worried that we might not be able to turn these around in time, but by prioritising the list with Clare and sharing the workload with my colleague Joanne Shawcross, we managed to meet Clare’s deadlines. Whilst this was really challenging, it reinforced my confidence in our ability to deliver within tight deadlines. From a personal point of view, it helped me to understand more about Clare’s work and what it involves.

**Impact on Clare’s practice**
I have used these literature searches in a number of ways, both professionally and organisationally to improve my knowledge of the bigger picture and national context. Some of the literature searches were used to map referral patterns to local and national demographics for service redesign, whilst others have been used to address barriers to accessing the service for older people (Healthcare Commission, 2009). Some of the clinically relevant searches have also been cascaded throughout the different teams I work with. Personally, these searches have contributed to my continuing professional development (CPD) by informing the way I work and achieving targets relating to finding the evidence base for service design and development.

**Case study 3: Direct client care 5-19 January; 20-31 January 2011**
Library interventions delivered to support Clare’s practice:
- Two literature search digests delivered to enhance understanding around the issues of ‘anticipatory grief’ and ‘spirituality and suicide’.

**Clare’s Story**
Following on from the earlier work that Tracey has done for me, I made two requests to help develop my understanding of particular aspects of the client experience.

**Tracey’s Story**
These questions were a little different as they were very specific and related to Clare’s daily practice. It was very interesting to see what kinds of questions Clare had, and it was a different search experience for me.

**Impact on Clare’s practice**
Having digested the results of the literature searches, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of the issues involved and apply these to future situations. It has also encouraged me to think critically about how evidence can inform clinical practice; making sense of the client experience and evidence-based practice in action. The first request also helped me to identify another theoretical model of grieving and explore whether it could be applied to anticipatory grief. I have also shared some of this information with a tutor on the Lancaster Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Training Programme and am producing a paper on this topic.

**Lessons learnt**
Using the case study template to structure our discussions, we were able to extract some of the key lessons learnt and draw out implications for practitioners. Our initial meeting had a great impact on the way collaborative working evolved. Meeting face-to-face enabled us to develop and clarify a shared understanding of our goals and to discuss any areas of concern in a way that email and telephone contact would not. From Clare’s point of view, barriers relating to guilt, anxiety and a reluctance to engage in literature searching activities were transformed into evidence-based practice in action. From Tracey’s perspective, a greater understanding of practitioner needs was developed as was an increased confidence in delivering a quality service. As the relationship strengthened and confidence levels increased, the steps involved in the working relationship became streamlined and embedded as the norm, transforming into a bespoke service. On a practical level, each of the three case studies document different types of information requests, some on a larger scale than others, and there were no limits to the types of questions submitted. Initial search questions were explored in greater detail and the planning process involved more steps, but as the cycle was streamlined, a quicker, bespoke service has developed. Managing timescales and prioritising requests was an important aspect of the collaboration and were negotiated in all cases to ensure that the right evidence was delivered at the right time. Having a named contact has made all the difference and has raised the profile of the library service within Cumbria Partnership and has generated further training and information activities for Clare’s colleagues. This collaborative experience started with introductions and trying to understand each other’s requirements on a practical level, progressing to where we are now, reflecting on the whole process and sharing practice with others.
Implications for practitioners

- Library services can be tailor-made to meet specific service or project requirements.
- Meeting to discuss requirements in detail or for training facilitates the process.
- Library services can be used to support client care, professional development activities and service development.
- Regular use of the library services becomes an embedded procedure in evidence-based practice.

Affiliations

Tracey Pratchett, Clinical Librarian, Library Services Education Centre, Royal Lancaster Infirmary
Clare Jefferson, Clinical Psychologist, Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Contact information

Tracey Pratchett, tracey.pratchett@mbht.nhs.uk

References


