

UpToDate in practice in the NHS: A cornerstone of clinical decision- making and library engagement

Catherine Fisher, the former Head of Library Services at a large NHS Trust in the North-East of England, offers a comprehensive insight into the organisation's journey with UpToDate, highlighting its profound impact on library engagement and the wider clinical community.

Championing evidence-based practice through library services

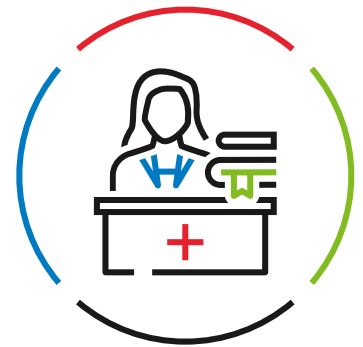
Catherine's 23-year tenure saw her champion the cause of evidence-based practice and the crucial role of the library in facilitating it. As head of service, she and her team were instrumental in the daily operations of the library, collaborating closely with medical and nurse education teams, learning and organisational development colleagues, and supporting the Trust's research and development initiatives. A significant aspect of their work involved ensuring that clinical staff, often with highly specialised interests, had timely access to the most current information within their fields.

"As a service, it was very much part of our role to provide the right information at the right time to all of our users," Catherine emphasises.

Adopting UpToDate: Meeting clinical needs and securing funding

The driving force behind the adoption of UpToDate were the needs and demands of the medical staff. "It seemed clear to me that a corporate subscription was the best solution for the Trust," she asserts. From an information management perspective, providing all clinical staff with access to the most reliable and up-to-date information was a paramount objective for Catherine.

While the original funding stemmed from postgraduate funds, Catherine acknowledges the challenges of relying solely on single sources of funding that change year on year. The complexities of NHS finances, particularly concerning funds flowing from deaneries and universities into Trusts, further underscored the need for a more sustainable funding model.





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Leveraging the Trust’s status as a Global Digital Exemplar, Catherine successfully garnered support from the IT leadership team. A Trust merger in 2019 enabled the consolidation of contracts, ensuring consistent access for all staff across multiple sites, with central funding secured through the medical director’s office from that point onwards.

Driving engagement and utilisation across clinical teams

The introduction of UpToDate had a noticeable impact on library engagement from clinical teams. The library strategically leveraged this interest to promote its broader offerings and raise awareness of UpToDate among new staff members. They conducted training sessions covering access methods, app setup, feature utilisation and personalised settings.

Catherine recalls the overwhelming popularity of UpToDate, describing it as “probably the most popular clinical resource that we have.” The mobile app proved particularly invaluable enabling staff working across sites to access the information they needed regardless of their physical location or the setup of clinical desktops. Staff feedback highlighted the efficiency gains and the positive impact on patient experience.

The benefits of UpToDate extended beyond medical staff, with pharmacy teams particularly valuing the tool for both clinical practice on wards and for educational purposes in training newly qualified pharmacists and doctors.

To encourage high utilisation of UpToDate across the Trust, the library implemented a robust outreach programme. This involved regular visits to all main service points on a six-to-eight-week rotation, active participation in formal meetings, and attendance at numerous departmental meetings and clinical staff conferences. The library’s regular newsletter also played a crucial role, often highlighting specific UpToDate topics and relevant patient information leaflets in conjunction with health awareness campaigns. Catherine has always advocated for dedicated UpToDate sessions on formal teaching programmes.

Advocating for sustainable funding and leadership support

Securing ongoing funding for UpToDate renewals often required persistence and advocacy. While clinicians overwhelmingly recognised the value of UpToDate, the support of key senior leaders, particularly the medical directors proved crucial in ensuring the library and clinician voice was heard. Catherine also emphasises the importance of demonstrating UpToDate's value and impact beyond doctors, highlighting the strong advocacy from pharmacy and nursing colleagues who recognised its benefits for staff development. UpToDate is even seen as a significant employee benefit in attracting and retaining staff in a competitive job market.

Drawing on her extensive experience, Catherine offers valuable advice to other NHS library leaders regarding encouraging the adoption of UpToDate. "Don't be shy!" she urges.

Catherine firmly believes that having UpToDate elevated the value of library services amongst clinical teams. She shares a compelling anecdote of a Foundation Year 2 doctor who utilised UpToDate to make an informed decision not to order an unnecessary and invasive blood test for a paediatric patient. This highlighted not only the direct impact on patient care but also the role of library-promoted resources in empowering doctors in training.

While acknowledging the challenges involved in securing and maintaining funding for library resources, Catherine concludes with a powerful reminder of the ultimate reward: "When you get feedback to say how the resource has helped patient care, it's worth it." Her insights underscore the transformative potential of readily accessible, evidence-based information in empowering healthcare professionals and ultimately improving quality of care.



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