

Real-life story - Holly Case

Holly wanted to be a librarian from an early age. But it wasn't until graduating from university that she started to seriously consider it as a career option. Now, she is helping frontline NHS staff and patients every day with accurate and reliable knowledge and information.



Holly Case Outreach librarian

Employer or university Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

Salary range ?25k-?35k

How I got into the role

From an early age, I wanted to be a librarian. As a family, we used to visit our local public library weekly and I loved it. It wasn't until I graduated from university with a BA Hons in History that I started to seriously consider it as a career option. While working for an insurance company for a year, I decided to do a Masters in Library and Information Management.

My first job before joining the NHS was in public libraries as a librarian with a real focus on health and well-being. It was similar to my current role as an outreach librarian, as I was going out to hard to reach user groups to tell them about public library services. As soon as the job of the Outreach Librarian came up at Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, I jumped at the chance. It meant being able to mix my passion for library services and networking skills. It was everything I had been looking for!

What I do

An outreach librarian's day is never the same! I work with up to eight different organisations, providing training sessions, inductions and support. This can mean I'm out and about a lot, which I love. It also means that those days in the office are precious. It gives me time to catch up and spend time with my colleagues.

I balance my time between the outreach work and providing evidence to support frontline NHS staff, such as doctors, nurses and occupational therapists. This is done through library searches and summaries. It can make a real difference to the lives of patients. I also chair a national group looking at how we can better support patients and the public with knowledge and information. I love being involved at a national level and getting the opportunity to support my colleagues across the country.

One of my proudest moments was winning an award for Partner Member of the Year from one of the organisations I work with. It's amazing to be recognised by the clinicians I work with, as it shows that they consider library and knowledge services to be a vital part of their work. ?

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The best bits and challenges

My favourite part of the job is helping people. Whether it's telling a room full of GPs about an electronic resource that will make their working lives easier, or supporting staff in their qualifications, my job often leaves me with an amazing sense of achievement.

Many people think that librarians sit in the library stamping books and shushing people, I am the complete opposite, as are the majority of librarians in the NHS! I'm always talking, reminding frontline staff about the importance of making evidence-based decisions for patient care and making them aware of the support we can offer them in achieving that.

Time is the biggest challenge I face. I wish I had several more hours in each day! I never want to turn someone away who wants my help, or give up the opportunity to speak to a group of staff or patients who may really benefit from library support.

Career plans and top tips for others

Healthcare librarians are very lucky. We are encouraged to undertake further professional development. There are great training sessions put together and I have found a lot of peer to peer support.

Outreach librarians are unique in that we have to be comfortable to talk and network with anyone, in order to get yourself and the service noticed. So you need to be outgoing! You also need to be flexible and organised if you're working in lots of different places with a wide range of user groups, like I am. You'll need all of this alongside those essential librarian skills, such as love for information, good research and technology skills.

If someone was interested in this role, I'd say go for it! You don't need to have experience of working in the NHS, but you have to be confident in your abilities and have a desire to build up your skills, and have some experience of working out and about ie not just within the physical library.

Life outside work

In my spare time I love to be around my friends, family and my cat! I'm also into fitness, so I try to be disciplined and train four times a week. I also love to read, which is handy as I run a reading group in the hospital.?

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