

Something old, someone new: a current awareness service for community-based health care professionals in Ireland

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Abstract

A pilot project for a new current awareness service (CAS) aimed at community-based health care professionals in Ireland was launched in 2023. The CAS took the form of quarterly research bulletins for staff across six specialities: Diabetes Care, Nursing in the Community, Occupational Therapy, Palliative Care, Physiotherapy, and Speech and Language Therapy. The CAS was formally evaluated after 12 months to determine its usefulness to recipients and to consider it as a solution to scale nationally across all geographical areas in the Health Service Executive (HSE). Results indicate that community-based healthcare professionals are appreciative of bespoke discipline-focused research bulletins to keep them up-to-date with research and developments. The inclusion of HSE Library news and updates was also well received.

Key words: library services; community health services; evidence-based practice; library surveys; pilot projects.

Background

In 2017, the HSE and the Department of Health in Ireland launched Sláintecare (1), a ten-year programme to transform Irish health and social care services. The programme focuses on the development and improvement of primary and community care services. HSE Library strives to ensure that our strategic developments support the continuing implementation of Sláintecare.

HSE Library comprises almost thirty physical libraries across the Republic of Ireland. Most of these libraries are located in acute hospitals. Historically, most library services were designed for hospital-based health and social care professionals.

In alignment with Sláintecare, a key objective of the HSE Library Strategy 2024-2029 (2) is the development of library outreach services in community and primary care settings. The library strategy highlights the importance of exploring and implementing new, creative community outreach pathways.

A HSE Library review of CAS (current awareness service) in 2023 (3) concluded there was inequitable access to CAS, along with duplication of this service across HSE geographical areas. The report explored whether services offered locally might be beneficial to

health care professionals nationally. Another key finding was the lack of formal evaluation of CAS across HSE Library.

A new library opened in Our Lady's Hospital Navan (OLHN) in 2022. To promote the new library to both hospital-based and community-based staff, a new CAS was developed by the librarian, in the form of subject-specific research bulletins.

Six departments across acute and community care agreed to take part in a 12-month CAS pilot project which was launched in September 2023. The intended objective was that the research bulletins would save users time by providing them with a filtered and personalised view of the most important and relevant information in their field.

The research bulletins were distributed via email on a quarterly basis to approximately 200 staff members in OLHN and to the local Primary Community and Continuing Care in County Meath (Meath PCCC). The timeframe for the pilot project was 12 months, to conclude with formal evaluation in the form of user feedback. The feedback will be shared with colleagues in the HSE Library's Community Outreach Team as a proof of concept, to encourage the sharing of resources and reduce duplication of effort.

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Method

A proposal email was submitted to several heads of department within OLHN and Meath PCCC to scope potential interest in the pilot project. The email explained that the quarterly bulletins would be in PDF format, and contain references, abstracts and links to journal articles, evidence-based practice, research and developments in their specialty. Based on feedback and interest, the following specialties were selected (Table 1). A total of about 200 staff members will be receiving the quarterly research bulletins.

The librarian selected subject-related journals and created alerts for same. The content of these alerts was scanned, with key evidence-based and research articles from each issue selected for inclusion in the research bulletins. Over the course of the 12 months, different software was used to create the bulletins. These included Microsoft Word, Publisher and Canva. Once complete, the bulletins were saved in PDF format for email distribution.

Research bulletin	Service	Sector
Diabetes Care	Diabetes Day Centre, OLHN	Acute
Nursing in the Community	Community and Public Health Nursing, Meath PCCC	Community Care
Occupational Therapy	Occupational Therapy, OLHN & Meath PCCC	Acute and Community Care
Palliative Care	North East Regional Palliative Care Services	Acute and Community Care
Physiotherapy	Physiotherapy, OLHN & Meath PCCC	Acute and Community Care
Speech & Language Therapy	Speech and Language Therapy, OLHN & Meath PCCC	Acute and Community Care

Table 1. Research bulletins by service and sector.

Results

A user feedback (UX) evaluation survey was designed using the SpringShare software, LibWizard. This was distributed via email to all pilot project participants (~200) in September 2024. There was a total of 64 responses (32%), the majority of which came from health and social care professionals (56.3%) and nursing/midwifery (42.2). More than 75% of responses came from staff in community care (Figure 1).

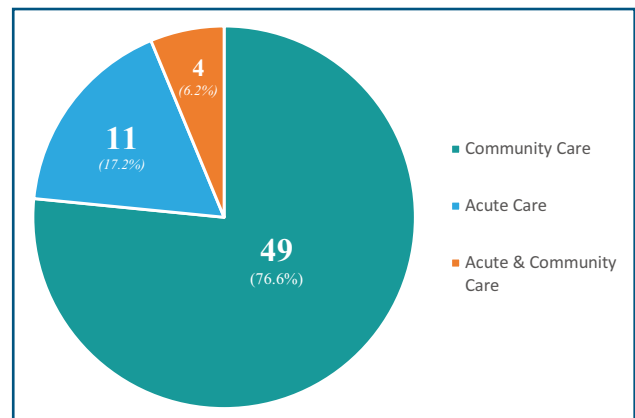


Fig. 1. Responses by health sector.

The number of responses by bulletin title were also captured (Figure 2). The response rate from staff in community care (Nursing in the Community, 31.3%) is significantly higher than nursing staff in an acute service (Diabetes Care, 4.7%). The other four bulletins were designed for health care professionals across both acute and community care sectors.

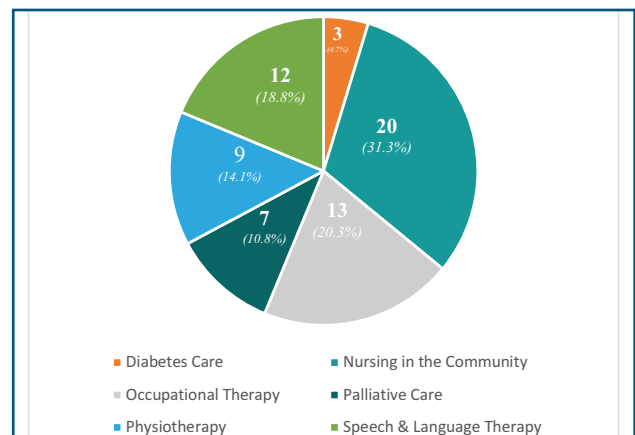


Fig. 2. Responses by bulletin title.

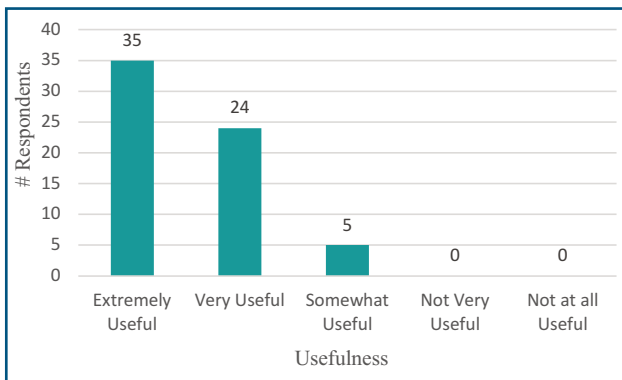


Fig. 3. Usefulness of research bulletins.

Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the research bulletins to them and their current practice (Figure 3). Feedback was very positive with over 90% rating the bulletins as either “extremely useful” or “very useful”. All survey respondents would recommend the research bulletins to a colleague.

The survey provided an open-ended question for feedback, comments and suggestions. Some key feedback is highlighted in Figure 4.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the CAS pilot project was to help health care professionals stay current with new evidence, research and guidelines, to promote evidence-informed healthcare decision-making and to save busy healthcare professionals time. Both the quantitative and qualitative open-ended feedback reflect the consensus that the research bulletins are excellent targeted publications for the busy health care professional.

The feedback from staff in Meath PCCC highlights genuine gratitude for this bespoke outreach service. This could be indicative of community care staff and services in other HSE areas. During this pilot phase, requests were received from healthcare professionals beyond Meath PCCC asking to subscribe to the research bulletins. Several of the bulletins are already being distributed beyond the original readership scope.

During the pilot phase, HSE Library colleagues also enquired about the research bulletins. Some libraries have subscribed to the research bulletins to distribute them to library patrons within their own HSE geographical areas.

Thank you so much for helping us to keep abreast of the literature in a very busy clinical world... to remind us collectively of our role within the wider health service.

Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Louth & Meath Specialist Palliative Care Services

We've started a **journal club** as a result of getting the articles. It gave us the push we needed!

Occupational Therapist, Meath Community Care

Helps to ensure **evidence-based practice**.

They encourage us to remember the library resources available to us.

Public Health Nurse, Meath Community Care

Occupational Therapist, Meath Community Care

"I couldn't speak more highly of this research bulletin. It is the most fantastic resource...Previously finding time and simply knowing where to start were **barriers to using library services** for the purpose of **CPD** and **research**- however, this project has made such a huge difference for me."

Speech & Language Therapist, Meath Community Care

Excellent bulletin... We have nothing similar available to us. ...A **one-stop shop**... This information platform has given us such a **broad capture of the contemporaneous evidence base**.

Public Health Nurse, Meath Community Care

Fig. 4. Key feedback.

There have also been requests from services not part of the pilot project, asking if they too can receive a subject-specific bulletin for their service.

Findings from this pilot project phase of this new CAS have been shared with the HSE Library Community Outreach Team Lead. A proposal that two of the community-based bulletins be made available to a wider geographical area for the next stage of the project has been agreed. From spring 2025, these bulletins will be shared with the HSE Library Community Outreach Team for national distribution:

1. nursing in the Community;
2. physiotherapy.

Going forward, ongoing formal evaluation of this project is critical, as is the standardisation of key performance indicators to capture the impact of this new CAS.

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