**Re-envisioning the library assistant role at the Royal College of Nursing: A day in the life**

**M25 Conference Poster (online) – Phil Segall**

This poster highlights the diversity of tasks and skills involved for library assistants at the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Library and Archive Service (LAS). We are a specialist nursing library, the largest in Europe, serving nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants. The service is based in London and serves a population of around 450,000 members across the UK and beyond, as well as the public. We’re an unusual service both in scope and in that we never see the majority of our users.

Reaching out to our users remotely means social media is a big part of my role. In addition to promoting events, services, competitions and a host of other activities, I also support others with use of technology such as TweetDeck. I liaise with other RCN teams about major campaigns, for instance Glove Awareness Week.

Something I really enjoy about my job is the chance to innovate. The “Breakout books” project is an example I brought back with me after attending the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) 2018. I trialled this in 2019 on one floor of our RCN HQ offices and by 2020 we were able to extend this to another three floors of the building.

The opportunity to lead tours is another energising part of the role. Colleagues were able to move this online with the Useeum “Nursing HERstories” project and it’s been really interesting to learn more about the rich history of the area surrounding our headquarters at 20 Cavendish Square. I field historical enquiries too; Family History Searches are just one example of this. I regularly liaise with our Archives team based in Edinburgh and it’s fascinating to learn about nursing history and the RCN’s history this way. Regional contact work offers opportunities to show off replicas of our historical materials at events – we have a history box of these artefacts (for instance old-fashioned feeding cups, baby-weighing devices and nurse chatelains) which we take around with us.

My link role with the Information Team is something else I find particularly enjoyable in my role. The link roles give us library assistants a chance to explore areas outside of our everyday role and to develop skills. Leading drop-in sessions has given me more confidence in my training skills and in my understanding of information literacy. Working as part of a relatively small LAS team, we also get a chance to experience aspects of the work of all teams in cross-team groups.  
  
During the current COVID-19 outbreak, working for an organisation fighting to support healthcare workers has brought the effects and tragedies of the pandemic into sharp focus. Things are very different, of course… yet in some ways the same. We’re still extremely innovative and forward-looking in our approach to reaching and supporting our users. Training sessions have moved online, thanks to Zoom, and we offer additional health and wellbeing sessions (for instance meditation, art and cutting your own hair!) to our members. Who knows what the eventual ‘new normal’ will bring, or when we’ll get back to the physical Library and Heritage Centre, yet seeing the changes we’ve made so far reassures me that we’ll continue to readily adapt and evolve our service into the future.