benefits of technology

Nursing students at Bangor are to be issued with laptops. Alan Thomas reports

NEW STUDENT nurses at Bangor will be issued with laptop computers for their three-year course. The computers will be equipped with Colloquia, a learning management software package developed at the University of Wales, Bangor. This will allow the students to interact with peers and tutors, access learning material, submit work electronically, and keep an electronic portfolio.

The National Assembly of Wales has sponsored the project, and will examine whether internet technologies can improve nurse education. The focus is on the use of electronic-mediated learning and the recording of achievements while students are on work placements.

All our students are taught information searching skills, including the use of library online databases such as CINHAL and Medline, and will be trained in the use of office, email, and web browser packages.

Students can use the laptops to write reports or produce presentations, wherever they are working. They will also be able to go online to search for information. Some of the more exciting possibilities include using online materials, such as websites, during a class and taking online exams.

The project aims to produce better educated nurses, who have ‘grown up’ in an IT culture and these students will go out into the health service expecting to use IT for the benefit of patients and themselves.

Dr Alan Thomas is Electronic Portfolio Project Manager at the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Studies, University of Wales, Bangor

Chat, learn and even set up your own website

WHAT ARE today’s nursing students looking for on the internet? To find out, I decided to ask some students via the university newsgroups.

Answers were varied and included:

- Chatting with friends, other students and nurses.
- Obtaining feedback/ideas/help from others (could these be called e-colleagues?).
- Accessing the library.
- Searching the literature.
- Database searching.
- Journal searches.
- Obtaining full-text journal articles.

Some students were sceptical about the information they found, but none of them mentioned how they judged the validity of the information they were using or what they judged as reputable. I feel this is a very important skill for students to learn.

The students liked the ‘open all hours’ ethos and virtual nature of the internet. Online journals with full-text were particularly welcomed as they avoided the frustration of using libraries. One student even researched her assignment without going into the library at all.

The sheer amount of information can sometimes be daunting, and some found not being able to access the information they needed frustrating. Two students had created websites of their own. One created the Student Nurse Underground at http://www.coopshouse.freeserve.co.uk, where students can communicate with each other and share example answers to topics.

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As a student half way through pre-registration midwifery training, I am regularly surrounded by books and research papers, but increasingly I am turning to a more interesting source of information. My last essay contained a number of citations from the internet.

When I’m researching a new subject, I might access a few tried and tested websites and follow the links available, or begin with a general search engine. Most search engines provide a huge list of hyperlinks you can access directly, or print and read later. But there are a few health-related ones I use regularly, including www.google.com, which provide links to virtually any area of health, medicine, and veterinary science.

I also use www.radmid.demon.co.uk, by the Association of Radical Midwives, which has links to various other sites including the National Childbirth Trust, and I subscribe to a midwifery email list at ukmidwifery@listbot.com.

I consider the internet absolutely essential to my education and future practice, and hope to see it available on every ward and in every clinic.