

# How to thrive (or survive) as an Information Specialist

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# What is an 'Information Specialist'?

## Who are you?

Primary role is information retrieval and record management for evidence synthesis

Should it include

- teaching/training?
- search methods research?
- Other 'non-evidence synthesis' searches, bibliometrics support?

It may be a secondary role e.g. Academic and NHS librarians, researchers?

Sole librarian? IS Team?

Income generating? Multiple sources/projects to cover salaries? Core funded?

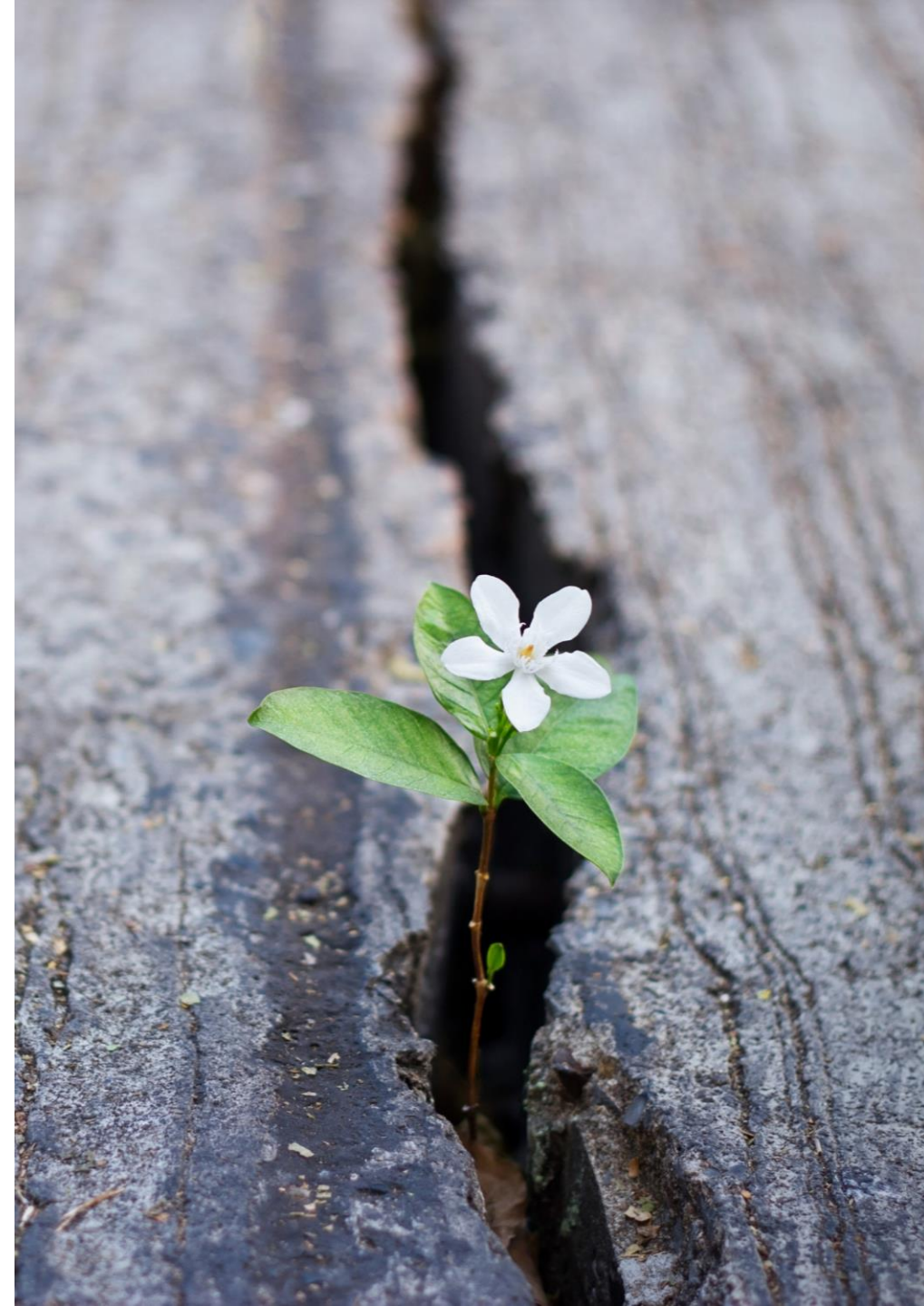
- Always say 'YES!' and figure out how to do it later...

# Thrive (or survive) - how is that measured?

Surviving is maintaining a sustainable job

## Thrive

- Securing funding / contracts for larger teams?
- Innovating information retrieval methods?
- Training the next generation of searchers?
- Raising the profile of information specialists?
- Broad Impact – improving research quality, evidence-based decision making?



# The career journey....

Information  
Officer, British  
Steel Research  
Library.  
Metallurgy  
Precise searches,  
1995-6

Knowledge Agent,  
MoD Research Site.  
Space science  
searches, grey lit  
searching, outreach  
1998-2001

Trials Search Co-ordinator (PT)  
Cochrane Schizophrenia Group  
RCT Systematic Review  
Searches  
1-2 days teaching p.a.  
Research dabbling  
2002 - 2007

Senior Information Specialist, Health  
Economics, U of Leeds.  
Any review type searches.  
Any topic  
Research proposal support  
Team management  
4-5 days teaching p.a.  
Research dabbling  
2010-17 (PT), 2017+ (FT)



Assistant Librarian,  
Guy's Hospital  
Medical School.  
Precise searches,  
Weekly teaching  
1996-8

Career break,  
Freelance,  
Leeds Met Uni  
Cataloguer  
2001-2022

Information Specialist (PT), Health  
Economics, University of Leeds.  
Any review type searches.  
Any topic.  
Research proposal support  
1-2 days teaching p.a.  
2007-2010

# Thriving

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- ❖ Grown a team of 3 ISs (from 1 part-time person)
- ❖ Co-investigator on 21 research projects with a combined value of over £6.5 million
- ❖ IS team collaborated on >100 other research projects in the last 5 years
- ❖ Support 15-20 research proposals per year
- ❖ Supervise NIHR Advanced fellowship researcher and PhD (DClin) students
- ❖ Lead for several systematic review courses
- ❖ Associate Editor, Systematic Reviews
- ❖ NIHR reviewer (research proposals and final NIHR reports)



# Research outputs and impact

## Overton policy database statistics:

- 35 of my publications have been cited in 97 'policy documents' (e.g. NICE, AHRQ, OECD, LTHT).

## By comparison

- 125 of Andrew Booth's publications have been cited in 1000 policy documents.
- 64 of Julie Glanville's publications have been cited in 1522 policy documents.

But it's not a competition – the more the merrier!

## Publications:

10 search methods papers (1 as first author)

2 search methods book chapters (CE Modelling, Realist Research)

80 Co-authored papers – mostly evidence synthesis papers (includes 12 protocols)

Unpublished methods for EndNote deduplication, search filters, research question tools (PICO)

## Appendix A2: Summary of evidence from surveillance

2018 surveillance of [Type 2 diabetes prevention in people at high risk](#) (2012) NICE guideline PH38

### Summary of evidence from surveillance

Studies identified in searches are summarised from the information presented in their abstracts. Full texts are consulted in specific circumstances, for example if the full text is necessary to make a definitive statement about the impact of the study on current recommendations. For this surveillance review we looked for new evidence relating to the whole guideline.

Feedback from topic experts who advised us on the approach to this surveillance review, and from stakeholders if public consultation was conducted, was considered alongside the evidence to reach a final decision on the need to update each section of the guideline.

This document follows the structure of the guideline, with the recommendations cited at the start of each section, and the new evidence discussed below the relevant recommendations.

Summary of new evidence from 8-year (PH12)	Summary of new intelligence from 8-year surveillance (from topic experts or initial internal intelligence gathering)	Impact
<a href="#">Risk assessment</a>		
None	None	None
<a href="#">Encouraging people to have a risk assessment</a>		

Summary of evidence from 2018 surveillance of Type 2 diabetes prevention in people at high risk (2012) NICE guideline PH38 1 of 15

# Type 2 diabetes: prevention in people at high risk



**NICE**

15th Sep 2017

Evidence-based recommendations on preventing type 2 diabetes for adults at high risk of diabetes

**Cited by 93 other  
policy documents  
(inc. same source)**

**Cites:**

**10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0168549**

The Effectiveness of Pharmacological and Non-Pharmacological Interventions for Improving Glycaemic Control in Adults with Severe Mental Illness: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

**PLOS ONE**

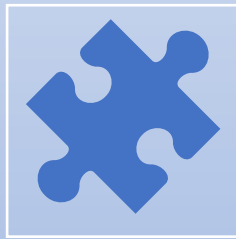
Authors are **Ian Kellar, Judy Wright, Kirstine McDermid, Ramzi A. Ajjan and Sarah Alderson**

# Adaptable core skills – we have them already!

From cataloguing... to precise metallurgy searches... to teaching MeSH...  
to youth crime theories



Good search skills,  
understand how  
databases work and their  
errors



Tackle searching different  
databases as a puzzle



Immerse yourself in the  
topic - learn it's unique  
vocabulary



Reference interviews -  
find out what the  
researchers 'want' and  
'need'

# Reference interview and relationships

Working together to agree what researchers and the project needs, and how best to deliver that

Understanding the topic and sources when it's new to you

It's an opportunity to impress!

E.G Planning requirements for rocket launch pads, identifying search terms for religious studies



# Literature Review Searches for Muslim Depression psychotherapy manual

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First meeting – red flags

Multiple questions – find similar interventions, evidence of effectiveness, perspectives of users and staff delivering the intervention

Systematic review to be published or literature review?

Islam or all faiths?

Quick search, small evidence base expected

Only search Medline, EMBASE, PsychInfo



# Doing the research (mostly in my own time)

Collected all the data during the research project

Identified research methods to use from published database comparison studies

Analysed data

Tried to write a paper

CILIP Library and Information Research Group writing workshop

Journal of Clinical Epidemiology peer-reviewer comments

Published in 2014 and is cited in search methods guides and research



# Perceptions and building a profile

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Project meetings and teaching are excellent places to demonstrate your expertise to a wide range of people

Call-out inadequate plans, poor search methods

“if you want to publish we need to.... search grey literature ... register a protocol....”

Quick ‘wins’ – AskJeeves with Head of Space Science

Unexpected champions - becoming a ‘realist searcher’

Profile building roles – journal editor, funder panel members



# So, how we can thrive?

Accept 'life' happens and the need for a balance

Remember our impact in improving lives –  
contributing to policies, decision-making, training  
people to find evidence themselves efficiently

Take chances, broaden your skills, adapt what you  
know – why not?

Teamwork for research and teaching

Raise our profile with current and emerging  
leaders

Nurture and use IS support networks

Be confident– you know more than most on  
Information Retrieval, rocket scientists think we  
are incredible!

