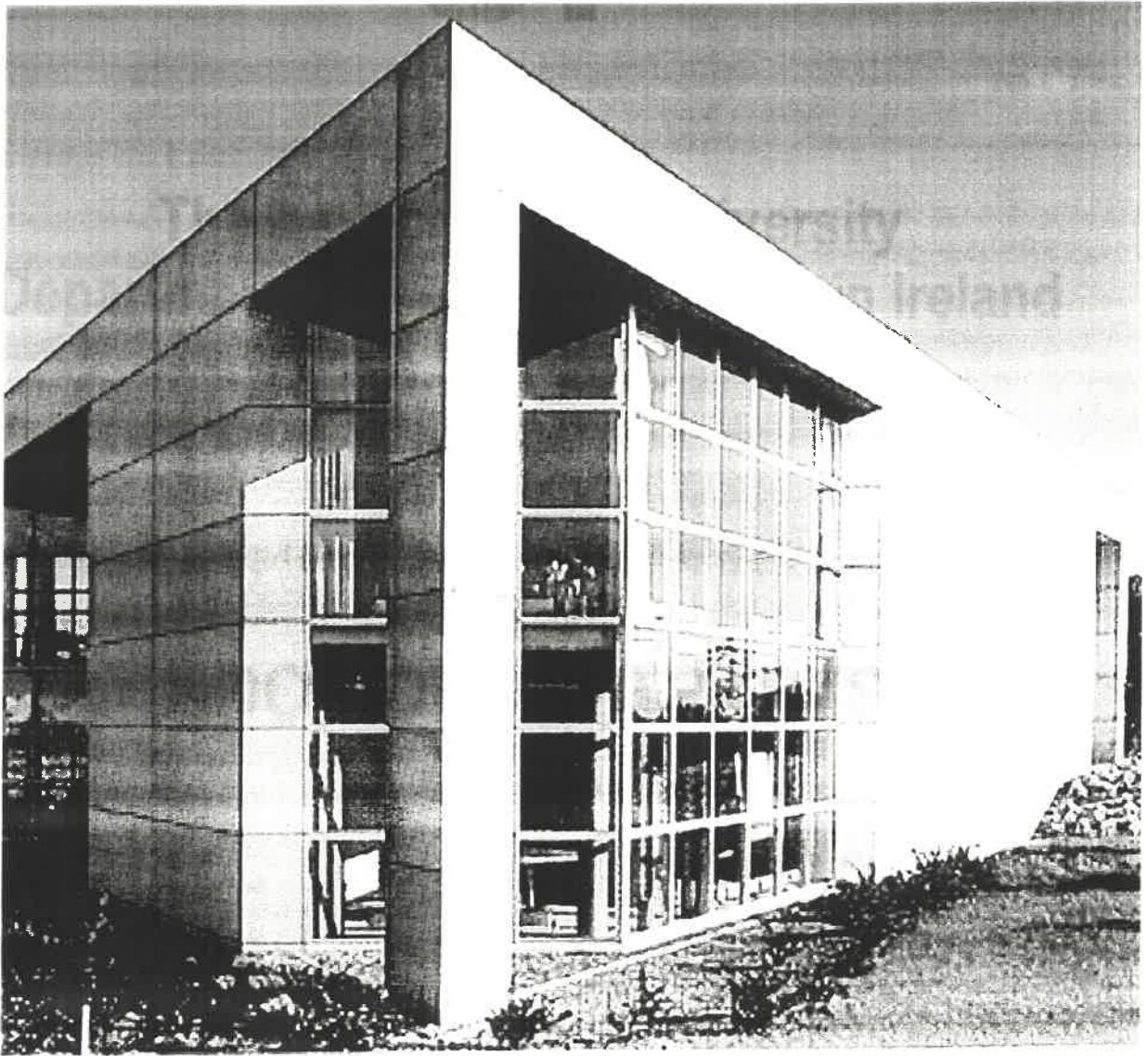


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The University Industry Centre

An evaluation of the Capacity for Evidence-based Practice

George Kernohan

Institute of Postgraduate Medical & Health Sciences, University Of Ulster,
NEWTOWNABBEY

Health and health research is undergoing a major shift, towards the better use of existing research, a shift away from primary research that ends with publication of a paper in an academic journal, towards clinical application of research results. This idea will shortly impact on primary care services delivered to or by each of us. Evidence-based practice (EBP) is at once fashionable and a major forward step in healthcare; at once bandwagon and arguably the best possible practice. Recognising this movement has the potential to deliver high quality patient and client care staff agreed to undergo scrutiny as to their ability to deliver the evidence-based agenda. The central objective of this project was to make the first move on this agenda; ascertain where staff stand; were they open to the new agenda; was there a capacity to develop.

For far too long the patterns of clinical practice and the way in which we organise and deliver health has been too influenced by professional opinion, historical practice and precedent, fashion, organisational and social culture. As a result we persist in using interventions that are ineffective, fail to start doing that which is known to be effective and tolerate variations in practice which mean that some patients receive ineffective care. In future science and evidence must play a greater role in decision-making in what GPs, nurses, and health visitors do.

Access to a computer is a key feature of EBP and results of this questionnaire survey show important gaps in access. Provision of up-to-date clinical information to all Primary Care staff is a challenging requirement for EBP. Given increasing computer access, either at the work place or at home, attention moves to the training requirement for staff at all levels to increase their capability for evidence-based practice. Basic training is particularly required, where staff cite zero experience with computers. However, appropriate distance learning methods may be of possible value.

From the responses to more traditional information sources are adequately used, though textbooks are used less than journals for professional update.

Staff perception puts the proportion of EBP at an acceptable mean figure of 62%. However this conceals a range from 18% -- 96% across the sites examined. They recognise such factors as cost, time, ease of implementation, and training needs as major potential barriers to EBP

Staff would be more confident if a librarian or informaticist was allocated to help with evidence seeking. Most see their colleagues as supportive in EBP. Staff perceive benefit in evidence-based practice and largely recognise their own position in the influencing changes to practice. They are very aware that health research provides an opportunity for personal development. They require support in terms of extra time, support and resources for EBP