

How to map health conditions, services and the like in my community

The mainstream press and TV, and trade press all require graphics to help illustrate and simplify complex health information.

There are various sources of Geographic Information Systems, one of which is offered on a complimentary basis to members of the Association of Health Care Journalists

<http://www.esri.com/>

Publications:

A detailed 70-page book ***Mapping the Gaps: Ideas for Using GIS to Enhance Local Health Department Priority Setting and Program Planning*** taking US examples, but setting out the general issues and approach, can be downloaded from

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2011/RAND_TR1146.pdf

A British-based example (MNK Boulos 2004) ***Towards evidence-based, GIS-driven national spatial health information infrastructure and surveillance services in the United Kingdom is available:*** <http://www.ij-healthgeographics.com/content/pdf/1476-072X-3-1.pdf>

Free access software and training materials on how to use it is available from various sources including <http://www.mapwindow.org/>

Sources:

Key to successful mapping of health conditions or other data are suitable data sources, which may be obtained from:

- central or local government,
- health providers
- NGOs, lobby groups and agencies,
- Academics and University departments

Sources of comment could be

- local or national politicians, health ministers –or opposition politicians
- specialist doctors, health workers and professionals
- NGOs, lobby groups and agencies
- academics and University departments

Critique:

It's very important that journalists ensure that they ***understand*** the data they are using and its significance, and are not simply carried away with enthusiasm to use new software and demonstrate technical skill. Translating the visual images from the mapping software into a format of print or broadcast quality may itself be a complicated task, and it's best to begin with a small scale test before attempting it with a large and complex piece of work.