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Citation:

Cole, PG (2019) Tackling threshold concepts when teaching information literacy in a 'post-complex' world: drawing inspiration from, and parallels with, the healthcare profession. In: LILAC: Librarian's Information Literacy Annual Conference, 24 April 2019 - 26 April 2019, University of Nottingham. (Unpublished)

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Conference or Workshop Item (Presentation)

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# Tackling threshold concepts when teaching information literacy in a 'post-complex' world

Drawing inspiration from and parallels with the  
healthcare profession

Penelope Cole



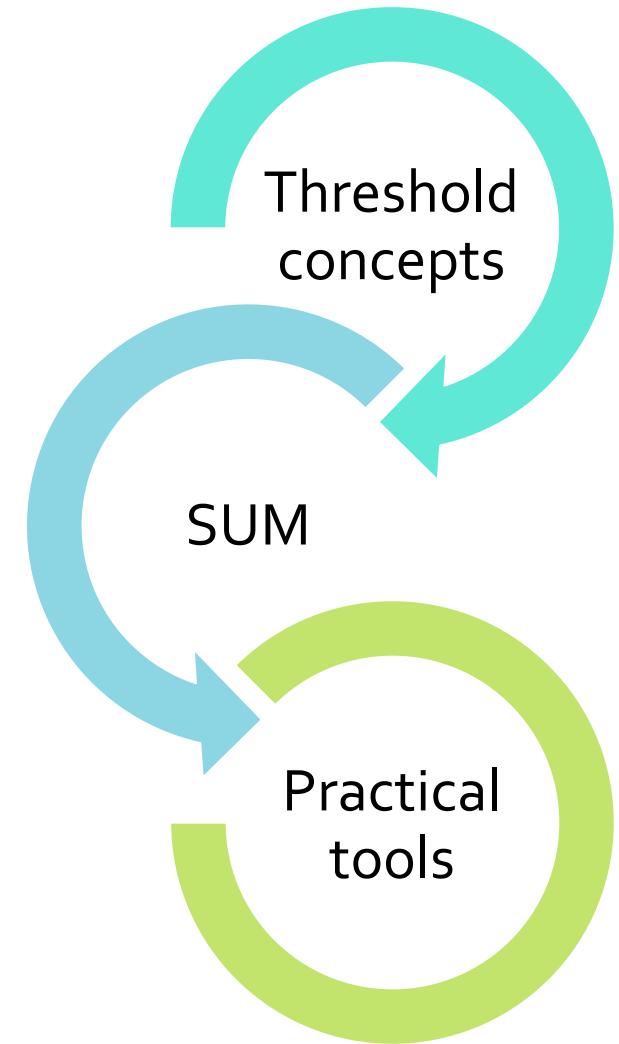
# Take a seat & play a game





# Workshop outline & learning objectives

- Identify the threshold concepts in your own area of work
- Design learning activities to support service users in overcoming these threshold concepts





# What are threshold concepts?



- 7 Characteristics:
- Transformative
- Troublesome
- Irreversible
- Integrative
- Bounded
- Constitutive
- Discursive

(Meyer and Land, 2006)



## What is SUM? How does it link with TCs & IL?

Medical knowledge is troublesome – it has created a barrier between patients and themselves. Medical professionals hold all the “power”. We live in a ‘post-complex’ world where everything is “easy” – it is frustrating when things take longer, or are harder, than we expect. SUM aims to empower the patient (Murphy, 2018).

*“The shared understanding of medicine is a process whereby people are enabled to understand the best knowledge and resources available to meet their health needs.” (Lehman, 2018)*

IL = enabling and empowering individuals to find and use information to meet their needs

“Disciplinary lens” (Hofer, Hanick & Townsend, 2018)



## Your turn

- What are the Threshold Concepts your service users face?
- Does it vary between groups?
- Does it change throughout the year(s)?



Concept of research

What is research?

Own ability

Troublesome selves

Post...

Student expectation

Troublesome environment

**Information is complicated**

Martindale, Land, Rattray and Anderson in Land, Meyer and Flanagan, 2016





Troublesome  
knowledge

Appropriate  
learning  
activities

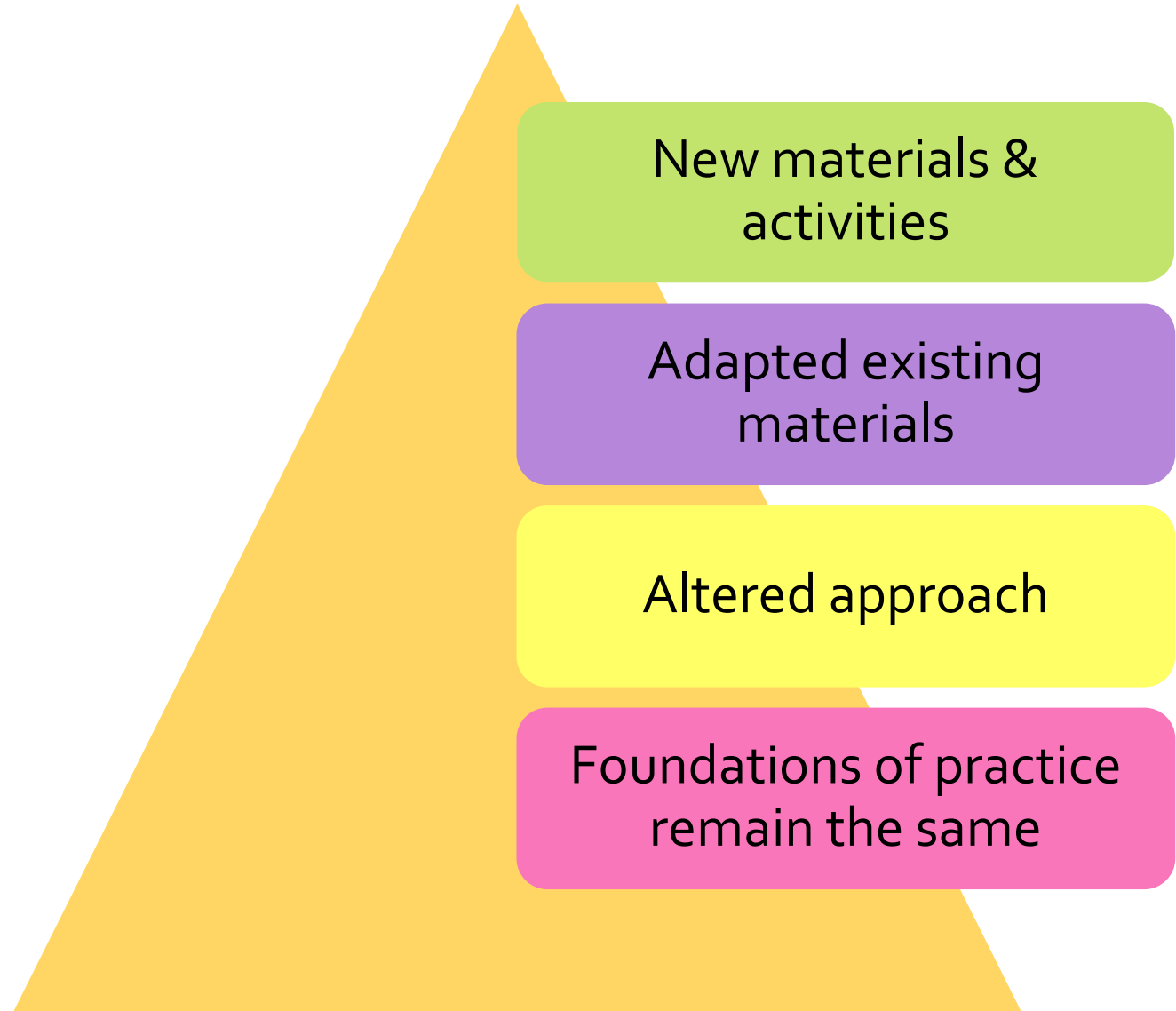


Transformed  
knowledge





What have I  
done to help  
students  
overcome TCs?





Altered approach

- Stop apologizing
- Focus on the TC
- Make it obvious



Adapted materials

- Rephrasing topics as case studies
- PICO to search plan



New materials & activities

- Put TC on a slide
- Generic tasks
  - Where's Wally
  - Puzzles
  - Images/videos

Foundation: embedded, contextual, practical

# Medicine/healthcare is complicated



It's not that simple, Clinical decisions rely on evidence, expertise and time

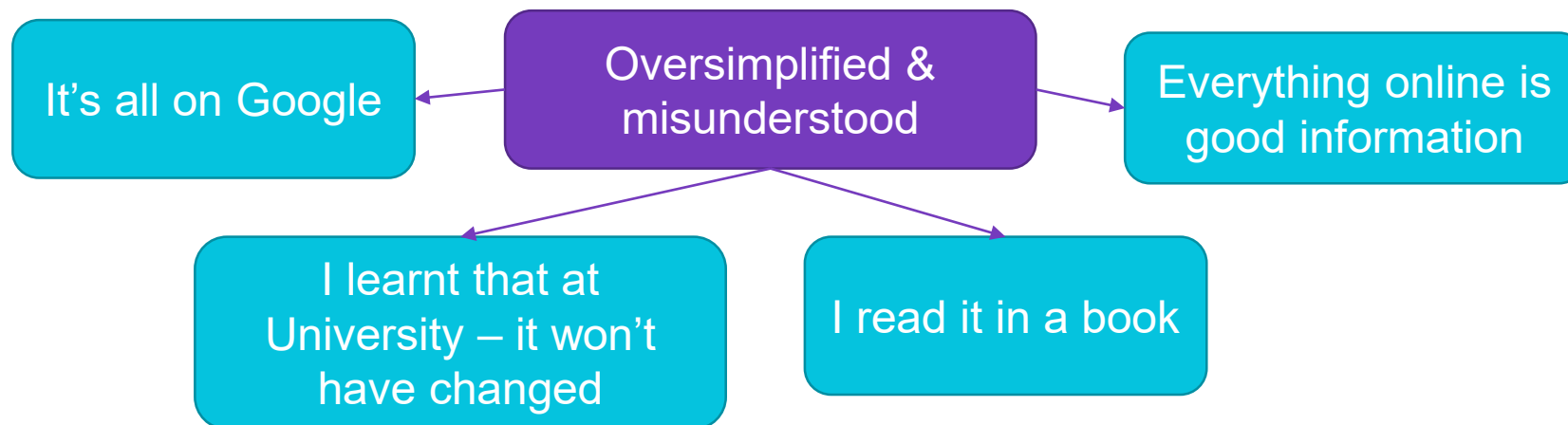
Evidence comes from billions of pounds spent on research annually

Research produces information, vast quantities of information.

Make it obvious

# Information is complicated

Put the TC on the slide



It's not that simple, however skills can be developed, knowledge gained and systems navigated to make the process easier

It all starts with your library/resource centre/literature available (at University or in practice)

So let's do this...

Make it obvious & stop apologizing

My topic:

What do I already know about this topic? Key theories, policies, authors etc.

Where am I going to search? What resources will I use?

Which search tools can I use?  
Consider combining terms, phrase searching & truncation

What keywords can I use to search for this topic?

Add more rows/columns if needed

Keyword /concept	Synonyms /alternative terms		
Cognitive behavioural therapy	CBT		
Teenagers	Young people	adolescents	

Search strings to try e.g. ("cognitive behavioural therapy" OR CBT) AND teen\*

Adapted from PICO table to suit other subjects

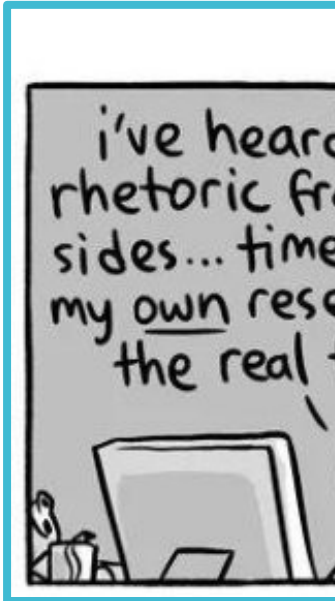


## New materials

- Where's Wally – methodical approach – he's there but so are lots of others that look like him – examine closer
- Puzzle without a box – you won't know the answer – piece together information – try not to be bias
- Analogies/ metaphors (Holliday, 2017 and Brown, 2018)
- Images & Video clips



# Words & pictures



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Link materials  
together





## Create a plan

- What have you done in the past? Could you map these closer to your identified TCs?
- What would you like to try?
- How would that fit with the curriculum design and intended learning outcomes?

# Recap & round up

1. Identify the threshold concept(s) your users face
2. Establish how you would help students to overcome it
3. Adapt existing learning activities
4. Develop learning activities (if needed)
5. Test & gather feedback

Remember it does not have to be a big change

## References

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Lehman, R. (2018) *Email to P Cole*. 30 October 2018.

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Murphy, M. (2018) Encouraging clinicians to source evidence-based material and share decisions with patients. Health Libraries Group Conference 2018. 14 June, Keele University. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zpWYxsZ08oToXghSPepvdIHTcqVThTUf>

## Recommended reading

Godbey, S., Wainscott, S., B., and Goodman, X. eds. (2017) *Disciplinary Applications of Information Literacy Threshold Concepts*. Chicago: Association of Academic and Research Libraries.



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