

The Asia-Pacific Health, Law And Special Libraries Conference

The Asia-Pacific Health, Law and Special Libraries Conference was a virtual event held from 13-15 June 2023. The conference's website, including program and speaker details, can be viewed [here](#). Several attendees were asked to record their thoughts on the conference. Their reflections are presented below.

Peter Murgatroyd

Library and Knowledge Services Manager | Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand, Counties Manukau

(Peter was one of the conference convenors. The text below is an abridged version of his summary delivered to attendees at the end of the conference.)

The theme of our conference has been Connecting. Recent years have brought changes to the way we live and work, where we live and work and how we interact. Connecting with each other, with our communities and cultures, with technology, and with information have become more critical than ever before. This Conference has explored our learnings from recent challenges and focused on the opportunities for the future.

The conference has brought together a diverse range of abstracts and presentations from library professionals across the health, law and special library sectors from across Australia and New Zealand. We have had insightful and inspiring keynotes from both Australia and New Zealand and as far afield as Canada and the United States. The theme of the conference was 'Connection' and the goal was to provide a space to share common challenges and opportunities across the profession, to learn from each other and to broaden both our understanding and our professional networks. From bridging divides and finding common ground to addressing challenges in mid-career, exploring the impacts of AI, Open Access, advocating for libraries, designing digital libraries, combating misinformation, and managing services in small teams, several common themes emerged:

Bridging Divides and Finding Common Ground: The conference recognized the increasing polarization in society and emphasized the importance of finding common ground, understanding diverse perspectives, and building trust. Whether it was in the context of personal interactions or professional collaborations, Jehan Casinader highlighted the need to connect with people who may differ from us in various ways.

Adapting to Change and Overcoming Challenges: The presentations highlighted the evolving nature of the library profession and the challenges that information

professionals face. From navigating changes in organizational structures, addressing burnout and stagnant wages, to dealing with the disruptive influence of AI and misinformation, attendees gained insights into strategies for thriving in the face of adversity and driving positive change. Brandon West introduced us to the concepts of “vocational awe” and “slow librarianship” and reminded us that we all deserve to thrive.

Advocacy and Value Demonstration: Advocacy for libraries emerged as a central theme, emphasizing the importance of highlighting the value and impact of library services. Speakers emphasized the need for information professionals to effectively communicate the value they provide to their communities and to be aligned with their organisation’s vision and goals.

Digital Transformation and Design Thinking: The conference explored the evolving landscape of digital libraries and the need for information professionals to embrace digital transformation.

Misinformation and Information Literacy: The conference recognized the challenges posed by the spread of misinformation, particularly in the health domain. Speakers emphasized the role of information professionals in countering misinformation through evidence-based communication, providing accurate resources, and promoting information literacy to empower individuals and communities.

Collaboration and Teamwork: Collaboration emerged as a key theme across several presentations. Whether it was working in small liaison librarian teams, collaborating with learning and teaching teams, or fostering collegiality within our organisations, the value of collaboration in delivering effective library services and meeting stakeholder needs was underscored.

The conference emphasized the commitment of information professionals to social change, community engagement, inclusivity, and adaptability in the face of challenges. In our opening keynote Lisa Given stated that “social, cultural and economic wellbeing is at the heart of librarianship”. This theme was echoed throughout. Virginia Barbour stated that “a system wide shift to an equitable, bibliodiverse, open ecosystem requires political will and global collaboration”. Gemma Siemensma closed her lightning talk with the clarion call “Speak up. You can make a difference!”

I believe we can and we do.

Our presenters Ramona Naicker and Michela Goodwin demonstrated the difference they are making to fight racism and to address cultural bias.

The conference underscored the importance of building connections, leveraging emerging technologies responsibly, and demonstrating resilience. It has I believe been a success and I hope the seed for renewed interest in greater cross sectoral and trans Tasman collaboration in the future.

Helen Skoglund
Manager | Barwon Health Library

The Asia-Pacific Health, Law and Special Libraries Conference certainly lived up to its theme of 'Connecting'. It was an extremely relevant theme as we navigate re-connecting after the pandemic: connecting with each other; connecting our patrons to our library services and resources; as well as ensuring that we are providing well-balanced and relevant evidence as a matter of course. The program explored all aspects of connecting, whether it be through inclusion, innovation, or collaboration.

The presentations on inclusion were both moving and thought-provoking. We were told about the inequity and under-representation in current research and about the negative health impacts this has on minoritised populations. Strategies and discussions on how to educate and bridge these divides should be front of mind when providing health evidence to our clinicians.

Speaking of evidence, there was a very entertaining presentation on the misinformation dilemma; the underlying message was the importance of providing evidence-based information to debunk harmful misinformation. This led onto a great session by the Austin Health Librarians discussing their research into what health libraries are doing to address this in the health care community.

Connection through innovation is a familiar theme for librarians, whether it be keeping abreast of new technology or dealing with a lack of technology because of cyberattacks. It is an ongoing job of adaptation—but being librarians, adaptation is our superpower. The presentations on this topic showed that we must keep abreast of new technologies, learn how they work and how to use them, but also be able to quickly adapt to provide a library service if all technology goes down.

Connection through collaboration is important for librarians as we advocate for our libraries and staff while battling cost-cutting and space restrictions. The presentations on the value of library newsletters, library journals, and liaising with stakeholders as well as with peers, showed the worth of these tools in promoting and fostering library services.

The Asia-Pacific Health, Law and Special Libraries Conference was informative, entertaining, and thought-provoking. I look forward to the next conference, where we can all connect again.

Joanne Whitcombe

Liaison Librarian, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba

The ALIA Special Libraries Conference left attendees feeling inspired, informed, and connected. The 3-day online conference featured a diverse range of topics and created a vibrant space for attendees to share ideas, experiences and discuss emerging trends. Despite the virtual platform, each of the keynote speakers were engaging, the Q&A sessions fostered meaningful discussions that provided new ideas and perspectives, and the plenary sessions and lightning talks delved deeper into more specific areas of interest.

As someone who moved into a managerial role, then moved halfway around the world and into an adjacent sector, the session that resonated most with me was Brandon West's "Thriving in Your Mid-Career". In the ever-evolving landscape of librarianship, navigating your career as a whole can be exciting and challenging in equal parts and West presented their individual experiences and shared approaches to succeeding in the middle of one's professional life. Librarianship is a second career path for many, which raises the question: what exactly *is* mid-career? West suggested that it was more a state of mind where you have a level of proficiency in your chosen area rather than a notion of time served.

Much of the CPD available to information professionals focuses on acquiring the skills and knowledge to advance to a managerial role, but what are the alternatives and what development and mentoring opportunities are there for those who don't see themselves moving in those roles? West addresses this in a new book (co-edited with Elizabeth Galoozis), [Thriving as a mid-career librarian: identity, advocacy, and pathways](#).

Although aimed at mid-career librarians, West's advice rings true wherever you may be in your professional journey. If you are starting out, take time to reflect on your passions and aspirations, then set clear goals to create a career plan aligned with your strengths and long-term objectives. If you are already in a leadership role, model positive work-life behaviours and empower your team to make changes that allow them to thrive both in and out of work.

Librarians often face mounting responsibilities that can lead to burnout if not managed effectively and the concept of vocational awe can lead to job creep. West likened one's work life to the life cycle of a flower. Just as we should not expect a

flower to produce endless blooms, we cannot expect librarians to constantly perform at their highest level. Instead, West stressed the importance of effectively managing work-life balance, deprogramming unhealthy professional habits, and emphasised the need to find the time for personal pursuits and self-care to rest, recover and prepare for new challenges and professional growth.

West suggested that thriving in your career is an act of resistance – resisting the extra workloads, the scope creep and reclaiming agency. Just as flowers need a supportive ecosystem, your career will benefit from a support network of mentors, colleagues, and like-minded professionals, both within and beyond the library sphere. Cultivate meaningful professional relationships, seek guidance, and collaborate with others to enhance your growth. So, wherever you are in your professional journey, embrace the opportunities that come your way, but remember to take the time to regroup and recentre when needed, and with careful planning and nurturing, allow yourself to bloom.

Susan Smith

Library Manager | Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Crewe UK

This is a reflection on the Asia-Pacific Health, Law & Special Libraries Conference – Advocating for your library within your organisation. It was a panel discussion with Anna Griffith (Albury Wodonga Health), Erin Cairney (MinterEllisonRuddWatts), Lisa Paul (Ashurst) and Peter Murgatoyd (Te Whatu Ora Health).

Sharing advocacy techniques is always a thought-provoking discussion that makes me think what more can we do, but also it is something which highlights the commonality that exists across all libraries. This session made me travel back in time and reflect on my own journey and how I have used advocacy.

When I first started in my role at Mid Cheshire, it was a new role, coming in as NHS staff to an academically run library service. Staff felt threatened by my presence and on the first day I was hit by a list of demands and told what I could do and couldn't do. My job title was Senior Librarian, which matched the title of the Liaise Librarian from the University, so we were perceived in equal standing. We were governed by a partnership meeting led by a consultant who was paid to be an honorary librarian.

The first thing I need to do, was advocate for self. I listened to the staff and within 3 years achieved the impossible list they gave me and engaged them in all decisions. As part of a leadership course, I completed a 360 degree review of my leadership style and openly shared it with the team with my action plan for improvement. I shared some of the personality tests and got them to join me in my journey. I couldn't expect them to improve or change unless I was willing to do so as well.

Once the team was on board a real pace of change started to happen in the library and it united us in how to better care for our users. We rebranded the service, with a greater focus on digital and ease of access to resources.

Within the steering group the challenge was much more political, and I needed to understand the varying priorities and agendas. I had to establish Trust between the organisations. Again, transparency, compromise and advocating for all partners was key to being able to pass the changes in the service and eventually disband the honorary librarian role and move the meeting to a more strategic meeting of partners, rather than oversight until it was disbanded. At one point I really had to stand my ground and not back down with the consultants and by the end of the meeting I got a nod of approval. It taught me a lot about resilience and knowing yourself and how you relate to others and are perceived. I aimed to be someone who was approachable, a problem solver, efficient and innovative. I remember my line-manager at the time discussing the corridor reputation I was beginning to build.

The library however is not down to an individual, it is down to being a team and the need to advocate for the service. It involves the recognition of the individuals in the team and the public acknowledgement of the work they do. I found it was something they appreciated in private but were less comfortable about sharing the success. Around this time, I became involved in a national task and finish group working on an [impact toolkit](#). Locally we didn't have a big research department, we have very few people in each team so our usage figures for resources were always going to be low, so where others could do cost per download and prove value that just didn't work for me and likely never could. This work formed the basis of the highly successful [CILIP's #MillionDecisions campaign](#).

On a local level seeing the actual difference libraries made to staff and patients was a great boost to morale. Collecting case studies of where the library brought about change and made cost savings, could be aligned to Trust objectives, and using impact storytelling helped to advocate for the library internally and build its profile. Most reports I do still have an impact quote, as do many of the conversations I have with people.

The case-studies also helped advocate as a profession, it demonstrated the power of networks and storytelling and the cases from other libraries could be used locally to leverage new business cases. I used social media and emails to target people to share and see if this was something worth replicating. I am a strong advocate for the power of library networks. I also think it is important to move outside of your comfort zone and find new spaces and networks to show case what libraries can do. More recently I have been seconded to NHS England to support the development of a PG Cert in Clinical Data Sciences for non-informaticians. There are 10 funded places for health librarians in England a year and this places us alongside clinicians when

exploring practical applications of data and AI. The course is forming an alumnus which will allow participants to stay in contact beyond completion. By getting outside of your comfort zone, this is where you learn more about the people you work with and extend your thinking. This knowledge can then be fed back into the organisation and this work is informing a digital literacy discussion I am having with senior leaders in the organisation and the role the library places alongside Digital Clinical Systems and how we can overcome the challenges of putting research and guidelines into practice by improving the format and making more accessible at point of need.

It is also important for me to advocate for the organisation; I support the Trust in recognition of its innovation. I am heavily involved in the Reward and Recognition workstreams, leadership coaching, part of the Quality Improvement Facility and the Executive Workforce Assurance Group. This is about advocating the organisation for recruitment and retention and supporting others to share good practice outside of the Trust.

I agreed with the panellists with many of their solutions, whole-heartedly you need to know your audience and communicate in a style and way that is relevant to them. There are two ways to be motivated, 'Away From' and 'Towards'. I am a 'Towards' person who looks to the future and sees a goal we are heading towards in the future. Most NHS organisations are 'Away From' and it isn't about some future place, it is about mitigating risks. It is something I really need to be mindful of when communicating digital transformation or reframing where the library sits. It is useful in the fact that by continually solving larger organisation problems, you become more relevant to the service, but it can feel limiting and there is a more informal network of others with similar motivation who are more apt at taking risks and driving innovation.

In terms of challenges to service the biggest one recently has been withdrawal of our academic partners. This, however, is a real opportunity for us to refocus the service and like many of the panellists we are heavily weeding our collections to be more up to date and have good breadth. The priority however has been looking to the future and understanding where the library needs to position itself in a world of evolving technologies, how do we ensure effective knowledge transfer and evidence is more than data and has the research and patients at its core. We will be going through a new rebrand to promote some of the key changes and share the ways we are working with departments and leaders to support workforce transformation, horizon scanning and driving change as well as more traditional embedded services working alongside departments.

The restructure of library space has been important. We have always positioned ourselves as a safe space and one which can be used in emergencies. We have been supporting a health & wellbeing drop-in for strike action, temporary housing for a

team with a recent ceiling collapse, action centre for emergency preparedness, store for other departments. By being willing to compromise, helpfulness and sharing the value of the space for informal meetings with patients or external suppliers, holding interviews, studying, arts projects, wellbeing support, teaching etc the library has become a community space with greater reach beyond our usual members. We invited the Electronic Record Staff to share the library office, and now everyone who joins the Trust needs to visit us to get their staff card. Given this flex has ensured that the library has always remained in control of its space, and we get asked to support, rather than just taken over as has happened in other areas of the organisation as space is at a real premium.

One key difference we have experienced from the panellists is around funding. The value of the library is seen to be in the expertise of the staff and not the collection. We have taken hits to the budget several times and used innovative collaboration to jointly procure, and worked with the Copyright Licence Agency to improve who we can share information with across the NHS. Having this national buying power needs to be tempered to achieve value so there is a split between national, regional, and local procurement to ensure competition and achieve national value. We can prove innovation and willingness to meet our cost improvement cuts but managed to slowly improve our offer on less funding. The national offer gives us a base line and equity of service, the smaller local budget helps to tailor to local needs. We can normally turn around requests in a day, but it is often balanced by other services such as evidence summaries.

To me advocacy is multilayered, but it is based on relationships and expanding networks. It is about listening and understanding your stakeholders and finding a way to solve their problems and supporting people through and to drive change. The value and the impact of the service can be identified from both the successes, but also from sharing the failures and helping to create a learning health system to shape the future of healthcare. The risk of not doing so is patient safety, poor health outcomes, litigation, wasted expenditure, being non-competitive and loss of staff. Is there more we can do? Always. Locally there is more we can do to promote and evaluate our stock and create more transparency in our data as well as the impact case studies, but also more we can do to build the evidence base for librarianship through research to validate, support and share the work we are doing. Key action I will be doing from the session is exploring the use of PowerBI to do more with statistics.