

Health Library Staff Member Spotlight

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When did you first start working in a health library?

My first health job was actually my current position, which I started in January 2001.

How/Why did you join health librarianship?

I had a SA government contract which was ending soon, and I applied for two jobs in health libraries which were advertised, and was subsequently offered both. One job was for a very small specialist health library in the Medical Imaging Department of Flinders Medical Centre (FMC), and the other position was for the main medical library at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH). The QEH job included supervision of staff and had great scope for advancement, but I accepted the job at FMC because their interview panel came across as very friendly and happy, in contrast to the QEH panel who seemed quite stern and serious. And I have been very happy with my decision; one of the best aspects of my job has been the people I work with.

What was your previous employment background, prior to health libraries?

During my studies I completed a work experience module in the library of a private law firm. I enjoyed this very much and decided that was where I wanted my library career to be. As a result of this work experience I was offered a summer holiday job at another law firm, and following this I was head-hunted by the Supreme Court Library. In my third year of my library degree I accepted a 0.5FTE library support position at the Supreme Court Library of SA and managed to juggle full-time Uni with a half-time job.

By the end of the year a librarian position came up which management asked me to apply for, but by this time I decided demanding lawyers were not who I wanted to work for, and I moved on to a one year government contract supporting public libraries, which mostly involved cataloguing, looking after the (now defunct) SA film and video library, and their LOTE collection. The end of my contract coincided with the advertisements for the two health library positions, and I have been here ever since.

How do you describe your current position?

I would describe the position as very specialised; only focusing on medical imaging. My current position has been part-time, 0.4FTE since returning from maternity leave in 2006. My clients are staff only (no public contact), and primarily Radiologists (radiology consultants), our Registrars and Fellows, Radiographers (the

staff who take your images), and our Nurses. I also service our Admin and Management staff and occasionally staff from the executive office of SA Medical Imaging (the state-wide service my department now falls under).

What do you find most interesting about your current position?

I have been in this position for a long time and the changes I've seen have been most interesting. My initial job included tasks not seen in any other library that I know of. We have a hard copy radiology film library (which we no longer add to), and part of my job was in a dark room copying the films from interesting cases to be added to the collection. I also had to photograph images from radiology films (using a large light box with a camera I fitted overhead). I would then take the camera film to the dark room and develop it to make 35mm slides. The RSNA exams used hard copy film and I had to copy each of the films multiple times to make sets of films for use at each exam site. I have also been an exam invigilator.

So, during the early years of my position the job definitely required a librarian full-time. The change to digital medical imaging (picture archiving) at our site corresponded with other tasks moving to electronic form (such as ILL requests, etc.), which decreased my work load immensely. Luckily for me this coincided with my return from maternity leave, whereby I only wanted to work two days per week.

And then there is the cataloguing. There is no way a collection specialising in one specific area of health could use DDC. Subsequently we catalogued our resources according to the modality they focused on, so for example a book on MR imaging would be given the call number of MR followed by a successive number, e.g. MRI.01, MRI.02 etc.; General radiology GE.01, etc.

What has been your biggest professional challenge?

Probably two things...

1. The isolation of my position.

Not only am I a solo librarian, but I am in a very specialised library - if anyone knows of another hospital medical imaging library, please let me know! I reached out to the SA Health Library Service. I was lucky that their previous Knowledge Manager was pleased to find out I existed and took me under her wing to include me in all their in-house training and vendor demonstration sessions whenever possible. I value my relationship with this team to this day. The HLA is also invaluable.

2. Learning enough about medical imaging technology to function as a valued member of staff.

I attended every Radiography CPD session I could get to. We have monthly breakfast sessions which are presented by each modality; not only did I learn much about medical imaging, but I saw opportunities where I could offer my skills. I look out for new technologies being made available at our site (e.g. SPECT CT installation). When

I discovered we were acquiring a chest AI program for use with our SPECT CT, I immediately searched for relevant articles and sent them to our Clinical Director. I have occasionally sat in on clinical meetings, such as the weekly breast meeting; anything where I might learn something or can offer my skills. And being a small library I know the staff and what areas our consultants specialise in, or have a special interest in and can forward any articles I come across which might be of interest to them.

What do you consider the main issues affecting health librarianship today?

There are issues which affect every library, but of special mention is the rising cost of journals, especially when they are journals which are required to be held for training of registrars. In my field the journals *Radiology* and *Radiographics* come to mind. Both published by the RSNA who has not only come up with a pricing module which makes the journal very expensive for multiple site libraries, but the RSNA now also transitions the older volumes of these journals to a 'Legacy' collection. Libraries have already subscribed to these volumes, yet they are now only accessible electronically if the library pays (a rather exorbitant fee) to access the collection. And many librarians like myself had already weeded out the older volumes to make physical room, knowing that they were accessible to us online. Crystal ball moment!

Health librarianship has a lot to offer, particularly in SA. We are very lucky here that SA health libraries are valued to the point where a state-wide library portal has been set up and resources are accessible to anyone working across SA Health. But this isn't the case for many states, and it is a big problem... I cite the following article: Siemensma G *et al.* (2023) *Australian Health Review* doi:10.1071/AH23101

So my biggest tip is to market yourself in any way possible. Don't just get a foot in the door - be bold enough to give it a push. Seek out where your skills can be put to use. Make yourself invaluable to as many staff as possible, and eventually the right people will hear about your service. It doesn't matter who they are; if your CEO mentions something in their weekly email that you could help with, don't be afraid to contact them and tell them how your service can help. Or better still, do a quick search so that you can send an example of the type of information you can find. Send a welcome email to new staff to introduce your service - this might require a contact in HR or even a contact in each department of the hospital for someone to let you know when and who is being hired. Make up a library information pack and place it in every staff tea room of every ward and every department.

What would you do if you weren't a health librarian?

When I was studying Year 12 we had to pay for university; there was no scheme to delay the fees. My parents told me not to consider university because they couldn't afford it. But had things been different I probably would have studied sciences in high school and gone on to do a science degree; etymology interests me.

What is your favourite non-work activity?

I enjoy crochet; each finished project is a joyful achievement. I like weight training at the gym. And I enjoy puzzles such as Killer Sudoku and either playing a computer game called Guild Wars 2, or joining my daughter in some of the games she likes to play.

Anything else you would like to share about yourself?

This year I am being awarded my 25 year ALIA membership pin.
We have a beautiful Burmese kitten named Bonnie who turned one in November.

