

Reflections On Retirement

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In May this year I retired from my position as a librarian at Rockhampton Hospital Health Sciences Library. This stage of my career had spanned over nineteen years. My eventual foray into the world of librarianship took a very long and circuitous route, but it is something I've never regretted for an instant. Way back in the dawn of pre-history I completed an Arts Degree at University of Queensland, then succumbed to the inevitable family genetic predisposition to go nursing. My two sisters also became nurses and my mother was a Nurse Educator who taught us all! I trained at Rockhampton Base Hospital in the late 1970s, but never really intended to make nursing my lifelong career.

I did briefly think of becoming a librarian after my Arts Degree, but it wasn't until the late 1980s that I seriously began to take steps. Places were limited in the one and only Queensland Librarian course, so I moved to Canberra and did Midwifery training at Woden Valley Hospital. In 1993 I was overjoyed to get into the Graduate Diploma of Library & Information Management at Canberra University.

From the first day I felt as though I'd come home! I loved every minute of the course, despite having to attend lectures whilst continuing to work full time shifts in a postnatal ward. Unfortunately I got nabbed for several weeks night duty over the time I could have done an optional library practical placement. I've always regretted this as the lack of practical experience made it quite difficult to get a library position later. Full time positions were very hard to obtain at that time, despite the fact that I did a number of library volunteering jobs at the National Library and other places.

It wasn't until I moved back to Queensland in 1998 that my library career finally took off. After attending an ALIA event in Toowoomba, I was offered a short full-time library contract as a Library Officer in the Reference Section at the University of Southern Queensland Library (USQ). I remember walking in and immediately thinking that I was on the right planet! I did several short contracts there, and at the Public Library, along with casual nursing shifts at different hospitals. This led to a rather schizophrenic existence, especially the day when one public library client spluttered in shock, "But I saw you at the hospital??" I also had to nurse a couple of library colleagues when they were admitted for surgery. I found this quite disconcerting, but they assured me afterwards that they were very glad it was me looking after them!!

And indeed this was my life for the next few years, juggling library contracts which I loved, and casual nursing which I did NOT enjoy, but needed to keep doing to pay

the bills. I moved home to Rockhampton in 2002, and one of my mother's nursing colleagues suggested I submit my resume to the Rockhampton Hospital Library.

As you would expect, I'd always been told by people that my nursing experience would be absolutely wonderful for a medical library position. Upon graduating this was last on my list as I wanted to get as far away from hospitals as I could. However, fate has a peculiar way of making things happen.

Straight away I was offered a short term contract to backfill the Rural Network Information Librarian whose job involved regular training trips to all the far flung facilities covered by the library. These contracts were ongoing over the next two years to cover staff travel or conference leave, and as usual casual nursing filled in the gaps. In 2004 I backfilled holiday leave for the Library Managers at Redcliffe and Mount Isa Hospital Libraries - this was excellent experience especially in Mt Isa where I learned to catalogue the hard way, amidst ongoing computer and technical problems. The line manager was also very delighted about my nursing experience and offered me a nursing contract when I'd finished the library one. Naturally I had to decline, although over the years I was offered similar contracts especially in the Central West region.

During my Redcliffe stint, I was urgently contacted by Rockhampton Hospital Library to come back as the manager was leaving, and they would be short staffed. I was already committed to Mount Isa, but upon my return went straight back to Rockhampton Hospital Library and never left!

As for nursing, I kept my general registration for a number of years, and even did a few weekend casual shifts at Rockhampton Hospital to keep my hand in. In 2011 I decided this was absolutely ridiculous, and was totally overjoyed to finally "decommission" myself.

In 2005 I was appointed to the permanent full time position as Rural Liaison Librarian, and it was my turn to travel around our districts delivering Clinical Knowledge Network (CKN) training to Queensland Health staff. In those days Queensland Health was divided into three zones, with Rockhampton Hospital Library servicing the Central Zone. This was a massive area stretching from Rockhampton down to Kingaroy and Gympie, and out to Longreach, Winton and beyond in the central west. Initially we received separate CKN funding but this was later ceased. My life became very busy with the constant travel and planning. I paid yearly visits to the facilities in each Health Service District, holding CKN and database training sessions, and Evidence Based Practice and Clinical Appraisal Workshops. It was possible to hold workshops in the larger facilities with dedicated training rooms and networked computer access, but I constantly encountered technical problems or lack

of available computers. Eventually we acquired a travelling lap-top and datashow to be self-sufficient if the need arose.

Life was also perilous on the road as I usually travelled alone, even to the Central West. I soon learnt not to drive in the early mornings or evenings when vast numbers of native animals and birds were on the move. I hit a small kangaroo on a back road to Isisford on one trip, but didn't incur any visible damage. Another colleague fell foul of an emu on an earlier trip, but luckily was travelling with other people at the time.

While staff were always very hospitable and glad to see me, training sessions were often fraught with interruptions, problems and even emergencies. A lot of my sessions were held around the only available ward or department computer, with staff coming and going as their workload allowed. This was a big problem in the smaller facilities, especially the remote Primary Health Care Centres with very low staff numbers. Sometimes I would be trying to train people at the main reception desk where an endless stream of clients would appear, needing medical attention or just popping in for a chat.

One of my colleagues was unfortunate enough to have a cardiac arrest occur during one of her training sessions, so the staff immediately rushed off to assist the patient. I remember having a great group assembled at the end of their shift for a quick session. Suddenly they all got up and disappeared without a word, it was knock-off time! Vanishing staff were a common occurrence.

A typical day would see me arrive, locate someone in authority to introduce myself, then be ushered to an available computer in a remote room or at the nurses' station, hopefully be given a cup of coffee and left to it. Quite often they would have forgotten I was due to visit, or the person I'd liaised with was on leave or days off. With promises of rounding people up, the staff member would depart and often I never saw them again. Sometimes nobody came, or a trickle of staff when they were free, or the odd person who was studying and needed help. At one rural facility I set up the training room, then found out that all the health workers had gone home for lunch. Eventually they came back and the training could resume!

Other visits could see the staff all ready and lined up by the Director of Nursing, and very keen to listen. At times facilities and departments were so busy or full of emergencies that there was no way any training could take place, so I'd carry on to the next place.

Training health staff in the clinical setting is far from an ideal situation as the needs of the patients must always come first. Often I arranged training sessions around

staff inservices or handover times, or would set myself up in a quiet room with a computer so staff could come for individual sessions.

While my job wasn't a typical librarian role, and not at all what I'd first envisioned myself doing, it was very rewarding and provided experiences that most librarians would never encounter. The hospitality of bush staff was incredible, and many staff members often thanked us for thinking of them and travelling all that way to visit them. We always had a notable upsurge in client requests from a particular area after these training sessions. Most staff, and indeed many in larger hospitals today, are still unaware that the health science library exists and can offer so many services to assist their clinical practice, research or study.

Eventually our CKN funding was withdrawn and we ceased training trips in 2013. I was happy to be back in the library at this stage, as now I had a chance to concentrate on my first love, simply being a librarian. The constant travel was very tiring and also long distance driving was hazardous.

Initially the library was situated in the old Nurses' Quarters building as part of the Yangulla Rural Health Training Unit. This was demolished in 2008, and the library moved to a large "temporary" demountable on the hospital campus. In 2015 the demountable site was commandeered for another building, so the library moved to a very small temporary space in a new ward block, where it remains to this very day. A new library space has yet to be fitted out due to lack of funding.

Despite thoroughly enjoying my library career, I was very glad to retire and love every minute of it! Plans include more overseas travel and a trip on the Indian Pacific when possible, taking up golf, and long overdue home renovations. I have enough family history to collate and organize until I'm at least 95, not to mention learning to play Mah Jong and other activities which involve lots of coffee and lunches 😊.