

Editorial – Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

Daniel McDonald

Librarian, Darling Downs Health | Editor, JoHILA

HLAnewsed@alia.org.au | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8385-3671>

“The more things change, the more they stay the same” goes the proverbial cliché. Sometimes this is a good thing. This is the first issue of JoHILA’s third volume and enhancements are slowly being incorporated. JoHILA content is now included in the open access journal collections of Informit and Ebsco, and will be indexed in CINAHL. As well, JoHILA is now a member of CrossRef and as such DOIs will be assigned to each article. All of this will improve reach and discoverability. However, what has not changed is the quality of submissions, which continues to be excellent, and this issue is no exception. It remains a delight, three volumes in, to be showcasing all of the wonderful things health libraries are doing in this region and beyond.

Of course, things staying the same while giving the appearance of change is sometimes a terrible outcome. In the first issue of the third volume of the “New England Journal of Medicine”, published in January 1814, a British surgeon writes about gun shot wounds which, despite 208 years passing, continue to be a problem for American society. Perhaps even more unsettling, in an issue of the “Bulletin of the Medical Library Association” published in 1962, Elizabeth Beyerly of the World Health Organisation compares new American and Soviet medical subject heading lists. Though extremely tangential to the realpolitik of the cold war, such an article does seem strangely emblematic of the competing world views of the time. It would be a historical curiosity of little note were it not for the heartbreaking recidivism currently occurring in Ukraine. Would that things stayed changed sometimes.

Meanwhile, in lighter tones, some arguments seem immutably to stay the same despite the details ostensibly changing. In an editorial published in “JAMA” in 1967 LS King laments the proliferation of paperbacks and the diminishment of second-hand bookstores, decrying that “in the old second-hand bookstore we could easily be high browsers but in the paperback emporia we feel more and more like low browsers”. Quite what he would make of e-books and kindle readers and i-watches one could only guess.

And then there are those things that stay the same, but really should change. Like politics. As the federal election campaign lumbers on there is no discussion of, much less concrete proposals for, information literacy and health literacy. This despite a near ubiquitous focus in the last two years on keeping one another healthy, on the fundamental importance of a population that understands disease processes and mitigation strategies. We sigh with weary resignation, acknowledging the rocks of constrained budgets and the hard places of competing priorities, but would it not be

remarkable if things actually changed? If lawmakers and decision takers and money spenders declared that every primary school in the country would have a professionally staffed library because information literacy was of foundational importance. That evidence-based care was integral to countering the demands of an aging population so every tertiary hospital in the country will have a properly resourced and staffed clinical library, and a properly resourced and staffed patient library where users of the health system can be assisted in understanding their illness and its treatments. That scholarly communication has been price-gouged for too long, and profits should be returned to those responsible for research outputs, not shareholder value. That clean and clear information is as important as clean and clear water.

Plus ça change...

References

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