

ALIA Fellowship awarded to Melanie Foti

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Sometimes in your professional life you meet people who seem wise beyond their years. They often show an intuition and a conviction that others are willing to trust and follow. They seem to have an uncanny ability to just 'know' the most incisive questions to ask; to be able to grasp a situation and decide when it is better to act swiftly and when it is better to hold; when to stay the course and when a change of direction is needed; when to be pragmatic and when to stick to a longer-term vision. Melanie Foti is one of these people.

Career

Melanie Foti (nee Kammermann) graduated in 1994 from the University of Melbourne with a Graduate Diploma in Information Management, following on from a Bachelor of Science from Deakin University, in 1992.

Melanie's career in health librarianship culminated in her role as Chief Librarian, Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney, a position she held from 2000 to 2004. Prior to that, for 2 years she had been the Deputy, and for the previous 6 years, had held positions in Victoria as Library Manager in the Department of Health, and Librarian at North West Hospital, Melbourne, and at the Repatriation Hospital as a library assistant.

Amongst her peers, Melanie was a role model and mentor, a natural leader and coordinator, highly regarded by professional colleagues, as well as library and hospital staff. At Royal North Shore, she collaborated with a senior clinician to establish early remote access to the library's subscribed e-resources. As a manager she supported her staff and others in the NSW local health district, as well as in the wider state and national networks, organising many professional development and training events; and as HLA Convenor, she ensured that continuing professional development was one of the committee's top priorities.

Melanie now lives in Hong Kong, where she has maintained her connection with ALIA and HLA and her strong interest in health librarianship. She has continued her career in librarianship, and has forged a new path as a school librarian. She is co-coordinator of the Association of Librarians in English Speaking Schools (Hong Kong) and is an active contributor to the network.

Role in HLA

Melanie made a substantial contribution to ALIA's health library membership in a variety of roles. In 2001 she became the inaugural convenor of the newly established national ALIA Health Libraries Australia (HLA) Group, where for around a decade she drove the group's strategic direction. She led the Executive's initial strategic planning activities, helped to draft HLA's vision, and navigated a pathway through the volatile early stages of ALIA's structural transitioning of local, state-based, sectoral and special interest groups, into self-nominated, national groups¹. She was largely responsible for setting up the HLA Executive's portfolio structure identifying the committee's key areas of activity which remain the focus of our work today.

Melanie recognised the value of research and evidence to underpin HLA's advocacy for health librarianship as a profession amongst the various health, clinical, and information professions. This set the strategic direction for HLA's research portfolio. Most notable was her drive and perseverance in establishing the Workforce and Education research project² (2009-2011). In the concluding stages of the project, she set up communications and developed the relationship with Health Workforce Australia (the then national agency for health workforce strategy), to facilitate the recognition of health librarians as one of the 'self-regulating' professions in the national health profession's framework.

In 2014 Melanie received the Anne Harrison research award to conduct a census³ of Australian health librarians. This produced the most accurate picture of our profession to that date, and the resultant data have been used as the basis of nearly all our advocacy submissions, campaigns, and research articles.

Melanie was *HLA News* editor from 2005-2012, a voluntary role which she fulfilled with professionalism and dedication. Under her guidance *HLA News* developed into a high-quality publication which not only fulfilled its original brief of keeping HLA members informed of news in the Australian health library sector, but also aimed to include original, research articles. She had a strong commitment to seeing the publication develop into a more scholarly journal, a vision which, under the stewardship of subsequent editors, came to fruition in 2020, when HLA's *Journal of Health Information and Libraries Australasia* (JoHILA) was launched.

Melanie was the author of the 2008, 4th edition of *the Guidelines for Australian Health Libraries*, which, for almost fourteen years, have served the profession well. In reviewing and updating the previous edition, Melanie was able to incorporate a more strategic and future orientation, recognising the importance of aligning with overarching healthcare accreditation and quality improvement frameworks and organisational strategic planning processes.

I have worked in many professional forums and on a number of research and other library projects with Melanie, and known her as a colleague and a friend for nearly all of our years in librarianship. From my observations, Melanie was the leader who set HLA on the path to achieve a unifying vision for health librarianship that seemed beyond reach for the more fainthearted. On behalf of the HLA membership and librarianship at large, please accept our congratulations on your achievements and recognition conveyed in the ALIA Fellowship award.

References

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2. Australian Library and Information Association. Health Librarianship Workforce and Education: Research to Plan the Future. Final Report. May 2011. Gillian Hallam (Principal Researcher), Ann Ritchie (Project Leader). Project Steering Group: Cheryl Hamill, Suzanne Lewis, Patrick O'Connor, Melanie Kammermann, Catherine Clark & Carol Newton-Smith. <https://read.alia.org.au/health-librarianship-workforce-and-education-research-plan-future>
3. Kammermann, M. (2016). The Census of Australian Health Libraries and Health Librarians Working Outside the Traditional Library Setting: The Final Report. Canberra: ALIA. <https://read.alia.org.au/census-australian-health-libraries-and-health-librarians-working-outside-traditional-library-setting>