

Health Library Staff Member Spotlight

Tony Courtenay

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When did you first start working in a health library?

About 5 years ago.

How/Why did you join health librarianship?

It was very much, just an opportunity to progress my career without relocating to a major centre. Openings in regional areas are not super frequent. Applying for a position in a Health library was a bit of a leap... One that I do not regret making.

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

I have a wide range of vocational experience. It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to do when I grew-up. I came to Librarianship through teaching and have worked in; School Libraries, Public Libraries, Vocational Libraries, and now Health.

What do you find most interesting or enjoyable about your current position?

I love the mix of problem solving and customer service that health librarianship provides. There's a wonderful sense of satisfaction when people come to you with an issue and you can help them with the solution. It's also great hearing how the work we've undertaken here at the library has impacted on different areas of the hospital, from facility design through to patient care.

How do you describe your current position?

I manage a team of library professionals who support the information needs and skill development of doctors, nurses, students, researchers, caterers, tradies and everybody else that works in our health service. That sees us supporting clients from the Torres straits in the north to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the west and Hinchinbrook in the south.

What do you find most interesting or enjoyable about your current position?

Supporting the professional development of others in the Library sector. Many elements of this are not strictly "my job". I regularly mentor new members of the profession. I enjoy supporting and facilitating conferences and professional development events. Recently, I joined the committee for the "Australasian Evidence-Based Practice Librarians Institute". Perhaps the best example came earlier this year, when I had the pleasure of being backfilled (whilst on leave) by a staff member who came into the organisation as a trainee, 10 years earlier.

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

Health libraries experience a highly variable level of recognition in health services across the nation. As a general proposition I think it is fair to say that we all work within one flavour or another of bureaucracy. Many have found themselves positioned too far down the organisational structure to have a real voice.

When this happens organisational restructures and budgetary pressures can become a real threat to Health Libraries. Many have seen decisions like the Library being relegated to a demountable building in a hospital carpark, or watched an architect-designed space in a new building be appropriated by another branch of the health service.

The manger of a health service's library should, in my opinion, never be more than 3 layers below the executive of that service. This is the only way to ensure that they remain informed, and continue to have a voice that cannot be marginalised. Health services where this is true, frequently appreciate the strategic value of these informed, supportive, professional voices.

What have you been reading / watching / listening to of late that you have really enjoyed?

How great is YouTube? I have watched a man rebuild a sailing boat that he bought for \$1, then crossed the Atlantic in it. I have listened to people reading novels that I would otherwise have added to a massive to-read-list. And every time I am unsure how to build, make, repair, operate a thing... There is a patient step by step illustration of how to do that thing. I freely admit that I skip the A.I. generated content, that is becoming more common.