

Health Library Staff Member Spotlight

Angela Smith

District Manager Hunter New England Health Libraries

When did you first start working in a health library?

Over 30 years ago at the very youthful age of about 22. I arrived just after the commissioning of the John Hunter Hospital, Newcastle's largest tertiary hospital. I started as a volunteer shelving and photocopying.

How/Why did you join health librarianship?

I was passionate about a career in journalism or public relations actually but when I graduated we were in a mini-recession so the closest I got was delivering free newspapers to earn a few \$s and volunteering in the Library at John Hunter. The Library team were a very dedicated, wonderful group of people, the Library Manager was a strategic thinker and became a mentor and good friend. I'm still in touch with many of library team who have now retired. I realised I loved the people and the work in health. It was inspiring to be around so many dedicated health professionals and supporting them in their work. Such is the diversity of work in the Library I was soon growing my love of marketing and communications but in a health library setting.

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

Solid hospitality background that has really provided me with the kind of service orientation that has been at the core of who I am working in health libraries.

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

Always the people who I work alongside. I'm genuinely inspired by health professionals who work tirelessly to improve patient care often doing research with very little time and resourcing. The Library team are dedicated information professionals who are highly skilled, love their job and are underpaid but very much appreciated by me and other health service staff.

What has been your biggest professional challenge?

Taking on the Manager role post restructure after losing two thirds of our library team, our library space at the John Hunter and 25% of our operating budget.

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

Key issues include demonstrating impact in increasingly resource-constrained environments, responding to rapid technological change and AI, supporting digital and information literacy, ensuring equitable access to information, maintaining a skilled workforce, and helping users navigate an increasingly complex information environment.

If you were health library tsar for a day, with unlimited power and resources, what changes would you enact?

I would ensure every teaching hospital had a dedicated library space, appropriately staffed health libraries, sustainable funding, strong research support services, and recognition of libraries as essential infrastructure for evidence-based healthcare. I would also invest heavily in workforce development, digital innovation and knowledge management.

What petty gripe do you have about health or libraries or information technology?

Working in complex organisational environments and navigating IT service delivery, search platforms with different syntax, operators and limits. Gosh we could have collectively gained years of our lives if all databases searched in the same way and we weren't constantly following up on IT tickets.

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

That's a really good question...next!

What is your favourite non-work activity?

Travelling near and far and spending time with my partner, family and friends.

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

Oh I'm in a Elizabeth Strout era and absolutely absorbing all her books via Audible. I'm also enjoying Midnight Diner on Netflix a quirky Japanese series that keeps my more recent trips to Japan front of memory.

Anything else you would like to share about yourself?

I remain passionate about the role health libraries play in supporting evidence-based healthcare and research. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to work with dedicated colleagues across Australia and contribute to research support, professional networks, workforce development and library advocacy. I continue to be excited by opportunities to reimagine health library services for the future.

