

The metamorphosis of health libraries in Victoria

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This article aims to identify issues leading up to and following on from the Regional Medical Library Service (1976–1987) and acknowledge our colleagues who volunteered their time and resources to enhance the professionalism of health libraries across Victoria.

The history of early Australian medical libraries reveals their development in the middle of the nineteenth century within medical societies. One book remains from the earliest organised medical library in the Medical Society of Van Diemen's Land in 1842 (1-4). Melbourne's first medical society was the Port Phillip Medical Association in 1846. Six years later some of its members formed the Victorian Medical Association. Its primary role was to unify the profession to advance medical care. Doctors were frustrated not only by their isolation but also that the medical journals they received were at least three months old (5, 6).

Since the early 1970s, health libraries in Victoria have metamorphosed from humble collections of books and journals, run by clerks in health centres and hospitals, to professionally managed information services (7). A Victorian branch of the Australian Medical Librarians' Group (AMLG) was formed in 1971 and co-convened by Enid Meldrum (Medical Library, Alfred Hospital) and Fay Baker (Monash Medical School, Alfred Hospital). The aims of the AMLG were to:

- (a) promote the work of medical libraries
- (b) improve liaison between medical librarians
- (c) further education for medical librarianship.

Although they used the term 'librarian' in their name, they acknowledged the value of clerks and library technicians by stating that 'all persons working in hospital, medical and health services libraries' were welcome to join. Issues soon developed, however, as the large university and hospital libraries were approached by hospital clinicians and managers for help with their information needs and for setting up libraries.

In response to increasing requests Enid Meldrum and Fay Baker wrote to the Commissioner, Hospitals and Charities Commission (HACC), to offer advice from the AMLG regarding the setting-up and staffing of new hospital libraries and, especially, regional hospital libraries. They met the Commissioner in June 1973. Following additional feedback from the AMLG they discussed the possibility of offering help on an advisory and practical level to the Medical Superintendents of the Base Hospitals. They would also ascertain the need for medical libraries in the country areas.

The official AMLG Consultative Panel for small hospital libraries met at the Austin Hospital in 1973 and comprised Anne Harrison, Jacqueline Baillie, Enid Meldrum, Marion Rock, and Val Strantzen. They received numerous enquiries from hospitals (e.g. Dandenong & District; Wimmera Base at Horsham; Box Hill Hospital; Latrobe Valley Hospital) requesting advice on the establishment of medical libraries to be run by generally untrained persons. To ease their voluntary load and be consistent with their advice, Jacqueline Baillie (Biomedical Librarian, Monash University) prepared guidelines incorporating their discussions: 'Notes on plan of instruction for untrained persons in charge of hospital libraries' (8). Twenty-one points included: equipment, budget, selection, cataloguing, physical processing, interlibrary loans, borrowing, binding, MEDLARS, Central Medical Library Organization (CMLO),

statistics and library committee; and were a very rough draft to 'teach medical librarianship in three easy lessons'. The Consultative Panel also suggested an arrangement whereby 'learner' libraries could be paired with a larger hospital library.

Despite their best efforts, and perhaps fuelled by apparent ignorance about the purpose of library services, Enid Meldrum and Fay Baker had to write to the Medical Superintendent, Latrobe Valley Community Hospital, Moe, in September 1973 to protest at the assumption that complex professional work could be lightly undertaken by an unqualified person with no experience in library work. They recommended the employment of a part-time librarian or, at the very least, to fund a person to be trained in Melbourne by AMLG members as a temporary measure.

Three major issues took precedence in November 1973:

(a) Jacqueline Baillie accepted an offer from Mr L. Walsh, Supervisor, Victorian Hospitals Sector No. 1, Traralgon, to speak about how the information services and resources of the Monash Biomedical Library could be extended to general practitioners, researchers and other hospital personnel in the Gippsland region. The aim was to reduce professional isolation.

(b) Enid Meldrum successfully wrote to Marion Rock, Librarian, Austin Hospital, inviting Marion to co-convene the AMLG with Val Strantzen, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, as Enid and Fay had already completed two years. Enid noted the convenience of sharing with a willing colleague nearby and wrote very persuasively 'Do think it over. Please just don't say no quickly! After all, it need only be for 12 months, and that only means four meetings'.

(c) Jacqueline Baillie applauded Mr J. Walter, Manager, Wimmera Base Hospital, Horsham, for appointing a professional librarian, Mrs Sheldon, and offered to assist with training and visits to hospital libraries in Melbourne. These subsequently happened and Mrs Sheldon appreciated the assistance from her city colleagues.

Late in December 1973, Marion Rock sent Dr Charles Wilson, Medical Superintendent, Dandenong & District Hospital, copies of reports written to help establish the Austin's Library. He was grateful for the information and his subsequent visit. He noted of the Austin 'it is certainly the nicest setting for any library I have ever seen and the layout is both attractive, relaxing and I would imagine, ideal for those fortunate enough to work in it'. He purchased all of the recommended core book list and 25 journal subscriptions.

The work of the Consultative Panel was growing at an unsustainable rate and reflected their belief in the importance of health libraries, and the need for professionalism and maintenance of minimum standards. So, in 1974, Anne Harrison, in her role of Secretary of the CMLO and on behalf of the AMLG, wrote a submission pointing out the need for increased aid to the Committee of Enquiry into Hospital and Health Services in Victoria. This was vetted and approved by the co-convenors. Meanwhile the country visits continued. Jacqueline Baillie spoke to doctors at Traralgon Hospital – a mental hospital was to be set up in the area and was interested in interlibrary co-operation. She also visited Sale and Colac.

Professor Eddey (Committee of Accreditation of Hospitals) was impressed with the core book list and the AMLG's suggestion of 'matching' small country and larger metropolitan libraries. He felt there was a definite place for a single professional librarian to act as Consultant Librarian for a group of small hospitals and be employed by the HACC.

In July 1974, Jacqueline Baillie, Convenor, AMLG (Vic.), compiled a report that commenced with a history of medical libraries and schools in Australia (9). Up to the 1950s, medical schools existed in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth. After that, new schools were established in New

South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. However, there were major issues that needed to be addressed including the following:

- (a) There was no formal co-operation between medical libraries, except for small co-operation at the Victorian state level via the Central Medical Library Organization (CMLO).
- (b) Many libraries were staffed by people with little or no training – there was no course specific to medical librarianship.
- (c) There were no minimum standards – services depended on the training and experience of staff.
- (d) The types of libraries extended from universities/colleges/research institutions to teaching/non-teaching hospitals, medical societies, paramedical institutions and drug companies; however, there was no mention of nursing libraries.
- (e) MEDLARS had been available via the National Library of Australia since 1970 without charge. Planning to introduce MEDLINE would help all libraries but increase the document delivery load on university libraries as more resources were needed to supplement services.
- (f) Medical librarians had no formal connection with international associations. The future depended on funding, training and standards. There was a requirement for a national collection to support and subsidise regional libraries. Hospital libraries needed more stock, equipment, higher standards, and salary awards tied to some equivalent scale (later tied to allied health e.g. physiotherapy). The implementation of the Scientific and Technological Information Services Enquiry Committee (STISEC) Report (10) would help to meet these needs.

In October 1974, Jacqueline Baillie wrote to Professor R. Andrew, Dean of Medicine, Monash University, regarding the 'Notes of staffing of country hospital libraries'. She suggested that, instead of a clerk running a collection, trained library technicians could be employed and a municipal librarian could oversee these and link up with a major metropolitan hospital library. Jacqueline prepared a proposal for the regional organisation of country hospital libraries in Victoria (11). Key points acknowledged that access to medical information had changed. In order to attract young general practitioners to country areas, they must have easy access to information to keep them up to date. The proposal stated that, as country hospitals developed, so too must their libraries and they must cater to all clinical disciplines. They needed to avoid departmental collections. The library should be central, have a proper budget, contain core books and journals, and have adequate professional staffing. The current practice of using a secretary was unsustainable. The adoption of standard routines as advised by the AMLG would assist with the smooth transition of procedures. The AMLG would run workshops and give advice and assistance in the setting up and running of small hospital libraries.

Throughout 1975, regional visits and reports included: Enid Meldrum and Amy Bush to Mooroopna Base Hospital, and Fay Baker to the Mount Eliza Geriatric Centre (from where they reported that finances were too limited to allow progress at the time), and Fay Baker and Jacqueline Baillie to the Latrobe Valley Hospital. They discussed future development of the hospital library with Dr Mair and Mrs Riley (Moe Municipal Librarian). Dr Mair's secretary looked after the collection and a small room had been put aside for the library. It was unlikely that the existing nursing library could be combined. Pathology and speech pathology also held collections that could be listed in the main catalogue. The AMLG visitors noted that it was pleasant to be dealing with a qualified librarian (Moe) who understood at once what we were talking about.

In addition to specific visits, the AMLG also addressed groups to communicate the importance of professionally staffed libraries. On 14th April 1975, Amy Bush spoke at the Public Librarians' Regional Seminar in Shepparton. She outlined that the basic aim of the AMLG was the establishment of standards of library service in medical libraries. The distribution of doctors in rural areas was sparse. One of the main reasons was intellectual isolation from medical libraries. In Victoria, the Medical Practitioners Act was amended in 1973 to require all medical graduates to be employed in an 'approved institution' for one year in order to be eligible for registration. Hospitals required medical

library facilities in order to be accredited. The AMLG Consultative Panel was formed to assist with numerous requests for assistance from country hospitals. They linked country hospital libraries with large metropolitan libraries as well as the subscription-based CMLO. The regional public libraries could be the liaison point to assist with interlibrary loans and reference services for the doctors and increase awareness of their roles within their own communities.

One week later, on 21st April, 1975, a more detailed talk was given at the Library Council of Victoria, Public Libraries Division, Seminar on Regional Libraries, Maryborough. Although not named, it may have been given by Jacqueline Baillie, as it made comparisons to the law, chemistry and engineering libraries at Monash University. It also gave more detailed descriptions of CMLO, Scientific Serials in Australian Libraries (SSAL) and other document delivery schemes.

In May 1975, the Consultative Panel wrote to the Hospital Accreditation Committee of Intern Training, Medical Board of Victoria, to outline the help it offered to any small community or country hospital attempting to establish any sort of library service. They submitted a ten-point summary statement with a six-point supplementary statement to Dr Race. After several meetings, Dr Race agreed to present this to the HACC and suggested it be called the Regional Medical Library Service (RMLS).

The recommendation was approved by the chairman, along with the stamped and signed 'Minute Sheet of the HACC: File Subject: Medical library facilities in public hospitals'. The subsequent 'Circular No. 46/1976', dated 16th September from the HACC, announced the appointment of Mrs Patricia Nakouz as Regional Medical Librarian. Detailed information about the work of the RMLS was published in 2004 (12).

Several members of the panel remained involved as advisors to the HACC to further develop the RMLS role. Despite the increasing success of the service, they incurred disappointment when their proposal to reimburse travelling expenses was rejected because the RMLS was considered 'an advisory body [that] provided the Commission with Honorary Services'. In many cases members had travelled and held meetings with hospital superintendents during weekends.

Workshops were held in ensuing years to educate isolated clerks about basic library tasks. Once again, the panel ensured wide consultation with the AMLG to reach consensus about the content and program for unqualified hospital library personnel. Training commenced at the Mayfield Centre in 1977. Participants were issued with a substantial 72-page manual for library clerks in hospitals (13). It was emphasised that this was a familiarisation program only and the main aim was the standardisation of library procedures. This was followed by discussion of comments and issues from the evaluation questionnaire and planning for future workshops. Two more were held and attended by 22 clerks from 13 hospitals and 4 community health centres.

The third workshop, in October 1977, was held over three days at Enterprise House i.e. HACC, Melbourne. It was attended by eight clerks from eight hospitals. The aggregate of trainees was 26; 11 new libraries had been created from the inception of the RMLS; six qualified librarians had been appointed since 1976 with another about to qualify; catalogue cards for about 150 books were sent out each month; and an average of 373 reference queries were answered per month. The AMLG was thanked for their valuable support.

Just when the RMLS was well established, there were more changes at the Health Department which potentially threatened the role. Once again the panel raised their concern. A letter from the Acting Secretary, HACC, to the Acting Chairman, Consultative Panel to the Regional Medical Librarian (Anne McLean, Austin Hospital), acknowledged the value of Pat Nakouz's role and assured that this would not

be compromised by Pat's involvement in establishing the John Lindell Library; and that there would be additional staff to assist the RML position.

By 1977, several new libraries opened: Wimmera Base, Horsham; William Angliss, Ferntree Gully; Wangaratta Base; Nhill Hospital; and the Queen Elizabeth Geriatric Centre, Ballarat. A full-time librarian was also appointed to Goulburn Valley Base Hospital, Shepparton (the first since Ballarat Base Hospital's). The RMLS centrally catalogued resources for 24 hospitals and community health centres. In one month, 2,589 photocopies of journal articles were sent to 36 health institutions; 75 interlibrary loans were processed; and 12 MEDLINE searches were performed.

A decade later saw the inevitable retirement of the Regional Medical Librarian and unfortunate demise of the RMLS. Pat Nakouz thanked the Medical Libraries' Section (Victoria) for organising her farewell event and appreciated the opportunity to meet many of her colleagues. Lobbying commenced immediately by Enid Meldrum, Secretary, LAA Medical Libraries Section (now ALIA Health Libraries Australia), Victorian Group, who wrote to Dr J Yeatman, Chairman, Regional Medical Library Services Co-ordinating Committee, Health Department Victoria. From humble beginnings in 1976, where four hospitals initially expressed interest in the idea, there were now over 20 librarians in outer metropolitan and base hospitals, and approximately 60 library clerks in smaller hospitals, homes for the aged, community health centres, and other institutions that were unable to justify the services of a professional librarian. Since so much time, money and effort had been spent to develop these library services and provide access to information for clinicians in country areas, it was hoped that these would not break down. The reply to Enid's letter urging replacement was that the matter is 'presently under consideration' and should be addressed soon.

It was felt that lobbying should come from the members. Consequently, Veronica Delafosse, President, LAA Medical Libraries Section (Victorian Group) wrote to Catherine Gatt, John Lindell Library, Health Department Victoria, requesting that a letter be sent to the RML members asking them to write individually to Dr J Yeatman to point out which aspects that they were now missing. These could include: contact with colleagues, one-day seminars, professional support, regular updates to PEARL (PERiodicals Available in Regional Libraries), quarterly newsletter, and training for library clerks. It was hoped that many letters of appeal would assist the cause.

Unfortunately, the letters were not successful; but Andrew Rooke, Treasurer, LAA Health Libraries Section (HLS Victorian Group), wrote to Veronica Delafosse and suggested that, in consultation with the chief librarian of the John Lindell Library, Bill Sinclair, they recommend that the HLS group provide professional support to the country librarians. This could be facilitated through the addition of a specific country representative on the HLS committee, and a professionally hosted annual seminar day. Pat had previously organised 2–3 meetings per year. They provided staff development on professional issues, a vital opportunity for isolated librarians to share information and experience, and a forum for discussion of new developments and products.

The ALIA HLS (Vic) AGM President's Report includes the initiative of the outgoing 1988 Executive Committee to develop the position of the Country Representative. This role would support rural members who felt isolated from other health librarians and who wished to participate in activities in 1989. Scott Holmes, Librarian, Bendigo and Northern District Base Hospital, excelled in this inaugural role, which he outlined would involve: liaison with other country members; organising a yearly seminar for country members; serving members' general concerns; verbally reporting to the Executive Committee; and co-opting others as necessary. He included a questionnaire to gather information and ideas for the proposed seminars, e.g. content, venue, suitable weekdays, and whether to hold them over two days with available accommodation. Scott acknowledged that some of these functions would have been dealt with by the RML but that position was unlikely to be refilled. A one-day seminar at the

Health Department in Melbourne was attended by 30 health librarians. The theme, 'library automation', included MEDLINE on CD-ROM (Compact Disc Read Only Memory) and demonstrations of three library management systems. A second successful seminar was held later in the year.

The 1990 seminar, also held in Melbourne, included establishing the benefits of a library service; reports from the International Congress of Medical Librarians; copyright; successful submission writing; and a report of a job exchange in London by Norma Worswick from Ballarat Base Hospital.

Enid Meldrum wrote to Joanna Boast, Librarian, Latrobe Valley Hospital, in 1991 to encourage her to accept nomination for the Country Representative role. Joanna accepted and wanted to ensure that the country librarians were not isolated from mainstream library association activities. The ensuing seminar held once again centrally in the city was focussed on CD-ROMs: an introduction and overview, vendors discussing their products, networking multiple databases, and visits to libraries using them. These seminars metamorphosed into the combined GratisNet and Country Librarians' Meetings, and eventually into the annual Health Libraries Inc. conference.

The energetic and unwavering passion for professionally run libraries from our early colleagues cannot be underestimated. None of these events could have happened in isolation. The past repeats itself as we continue to work together to strive for better outcomes for our libraries and our clients. Although we now have the benefit of speedier virtual communication and information resources, it is the people who make it all happen. We salute our health library pioneers and strive to continue their legacy.

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Note: original correspondence and the AMLG publications are held in ALIA House, Canberra.