

A Health Library Managers' Think Tank

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Some twenty-five New South Wales health library managers took part in a lively Think Tank at St George Hospital on February 6th. It was an opportunity for an exchange of ideas as well as for interpersonal networking and conviviality. A combination of breakout groups and plenary sessions explored the key areas of health library practice. There were also representatives from Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland, who helped provide a national perspective. The five topics for discussion were:

1. The Digital Challenge: How do we embrace new digital opportunities while making the health library an integral participant in the information agenda within health services? How do we actively integrate appropriate digital technologies – such as e-books, WiFi, campus-wide knowledge-bases like DynaMed and UpToDate – as well as enable home mobile and tablet access to our services?
2. Document Delivery: How can we enhance current interlibrary-loan networks like GratisNet? How do we maintain a comprehensive, distributed national health paper/electronic collection in the wake of shrinking library budgets? Other areas of discussion were licensing arrangements and the need for a shared clearinghouse for archival material including unique back-runs of paper journals.
3. Books, E-Books, OPACS and the LMS: E-Books are popular at universities and public libraries but the uptake in health libraries has been slow. Participants sought an explanation for this situation given the dwindling of paper-based book collections. What will be the future of our OPACS if the book collection they point to is out-of-date and not comprehensive?
4. The Professional and Industrial Climate: Are health librarians flailing or flourishing as a profession? Several new hospital libraries have been created, some are planned. Some are disappearing. Given the changing digital/real-world landscape affecting the publishing industry, journalism and bookshops – are health libraries part of these dramatic changes? Are the trends reversible by imaginative management and by promotion of the library as a thriving knowledge place, not just as a work space to be defended? Participants also explored optimal administrative structures and service models.

In the final session (Strategies for the Future) five key issues were identified:

1. recognition of hospital libraries as part of the national hospital accreditation process
2. optimising administrative structures and networks
3. developing an ongoing collegial network of health library managers
4. enhancing the activities of rural health libraries
5. online health library client education and information literacy.

The Think Tank discussions will form the basis of a workshop later in 2015 at which the emerging ideas will be formulated into a cogent strategy and a formal document for publication.

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