The first Victorian "training course for medical records personnel" (Ell, 1984) was conducted in 1949 at the Royal Melbourne Hospital by the late and famous Edna K Huffman, the leading Registered Record Librarian from the United States of America. Thirty-seven students studied an intensive, block mode course; the topics included medical terminology, standard nomenclature, the role of the Medical Record Librarian in hospitals, quantitative analysis, numbering and filing, cross-indexing, statistics, and organisation and management. In the following years, guest lecturers from the USA and Australia gave presentations to managers of Medical Record Departments in Victorian hospitals. The next formal, short course was conducted in 1960 for the existing practitioners, and the first full-length two-year course commenced with three students in 1961 (Ell, 1984).

Some 43 years later, the Bachelor of Health Information Management (BHlthInfoManagement) is a very well established, highly successful and reputable baccalaureate degree offered by La Trobe University. The degree is three and a half years in length and is available also by part-time study. It is based in the Department of Health Information Management in the School of Public Health, in La Trobe’s large Faculty of Health Sciences.

The structure of the La Trobe undergraduate degree
The La Trobe University BHlthInfoManagement underwent a review in 1999-2000, which resulted in a major change in course focus, culture, structure, and content. The course now has four streams designed to prepare graduates for the key areas of specialisation in the profession of health information management.

Clinical (including Classification)
This stream is focused on health classification and the base clinical knowledge that is essential for the students to reach the high standard of clinical coding necessary in a casemix-based funding system. The stream includes medical terminology, advanced medical terminology, two anatomy and physiology subjects, two pathology subjects, and five health classification subjects (with a very strong emphasis on practical coding, but also including management of the coding function, casemix systems, introduction to auditing, and clinical terminologies).

Health informatics
There is a health informatics subject in each semester of the course, with the exception of the professional practice semester in Year 3. The areas of study include introductory information technology, health information management systems, database design and management, clinical information systems, system specification design, software evaluation, standards for health information technology, and electronic health records. One of the Year 1 subjects is taught partly online and incorporates the globally recognised International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL). The ICDL is a competency standard endorsed by the Australian Computer Society, and is the standard for computer literacy in over 88 countries. Completion of the modules provides the La Trobe students with the option of sitting the ICDL certification examination. Two computer laboratories with a range of health and related software support the teaching in the health informatics subjects.

Analysis of health data
This stream comprises introduction to research methods in health care, statistics, and two analysis subjects which include health data reporting systems, statistical applications of health care data, demography, epidemiology, critical analysis of reported data, and data applications in clinical trials and related clinical research.

Management and professional practice
The course has a strong focus on management theory linked to professional practice. There is a management-related subject in every semester: management of health information systems, quality and risk management, management and organisation theory, health and human behaviour, human resource management for health information services, business management (including casemix-based systems, strategic planning, financial and budgetary management), and health project and contract management. This stream includes supporting subjects such as health information law and ethics, and the Australian health care system.

The La Trobe course has a long tradition of practice-based experience. The course includes 14 weeks of clinical practice in hospitals, government departments, epidemiology and research centres, health screening agencies, health software companies, health insurance funds, and a wide range of services, including Koori health, community health, mental health, forensic mental health, and complementary medicine.

Online learning
Students spend most of the first semester in Year 3 undertaking professional practice and, simultaneously, they study three subjects via distance mode (fully online delivery). From 2004, they will take an interdisciplinary online subject that requires them to work, in online groups, with students from the other health courses in the Faculty. This subject has been devel-
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op ed to encourage students from the various disciplines to work together and to learn about their peer professions before entering the workforce.

Double degree with Health Sciences
From 2003 a new double degree, Bachelor of Health Information Management/Bachelor of Health Sciences, is available. The Health Sciences degree offers students the opportunity to stream in public health, or in anatomy and physiology, which complements their clinical coding knowledge and practice.

Students
For some years, the annual intake for the single degree has been approximately 60 students, with additional places available for international students. In addition, there are 10 students enrolled in the first year of the double degree.

Honours
An Honours stream is available and past students have produced an excellent standard of honours theses on health information management-related topics.

Postgraduate courses
A number of the La Trobe graduates progress to postgraduate study. The School of Public Health offers a range of options, one of which is the Master of Health Sciences with a minor thesis, which can be on a health information management topic. There are many Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma courses available, one of which is the Graduate Certificate in e-Healthcare, which is managed by the Health Information Management Department.

Professional Doctorate and Doctor of Philosophy
The School of Public Health offers a Doctorate in Public Health that is partly course-based and partly thesis-based. This is designed for practising professionals and is an ideal option for health information managers. The strong and well-supported PhD program in the School is also available to eligible health information management graduates.

World Health Organization fellowships
The Department has provided tailored training for individuals undertaking health information manage-

Research, projects and policy contributions
There is an expectation that all academic staff members will engage in research and related projects and contribute to state- and national-level policy and practice developments. The Department of Health Information Management lecturers have been involved in several major projects in the past two years, and contribute at national or state level to the development of health information technology standards and coding standards.

International program: Germany
The Department of Health Information Management has developed and taught a comprehensive clinical coding and casemix education program in Germany for the past two years. This 'train the trainer' program has included the development of a two-tier syllabus that has been taught by La Trobe University staff members to specially selected health professional staff members of German hospitals. In partnership with EPOS Health Consultants of Bad Homburg, Germany, La Trobe University provides a face-to-face course, in German and English, in preparation for the implementation of casemix-based funding for the German hospital system.

Reference

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