Feel like a change? Read about Health Information Managers in non-traditional jobs

Irene Kearsey

The theme

This issue has as its theme Health Information Managers working in non-traditional jobs. When the topic was allocated to this issue, I had, as a starting point, a list of non-traditional (and specialised) areas where Australian Health Information Managers were known to work. This list was the result of brainstorming by Health Information Management Journal editorial office-holders and HIMAA staff. With help, I added the names of individuals to many of these work areas. Then I began a round of telephone calls, asking people to write about their unusual jobs.

No one refused my request for an article outright: only one was unable to deliver because of other pressures, and some said there really wasn’t anything so different about what they actually did, even though their employer was a specialised health service.

Sometimes, people who agreed to write then suggested others in their work area. In a couple of cases this has resulted in some concentration of focus, but I do not think this detracts from any of the articles.

When I had enough promises, I stopped recruiting, leaving more than enough ideas for future issues like this one.

Each author was given free rein to write as much or as little as they wanted, covering whatever they wished to say about their job. However, I gave a list of aspects they might like to include. For example, one suggestion was, ‘What HIM skills do you use and what other skills did you need to acquire?’ Another was ‘What is a typical day (if there is such a thing)’? I asked for ‘personal’ and ‘informal’, not academic, in tone.

The issue

I think this is a great collection of articles – a really good read – and I thank all the authors for ‘telling it like it is’. At least one of the writers said she found the exercise personally helpful. And I hope those authors who have not written for publication before might take the plunge and write more.

Putting the articles into a sequence took me some agonising and quite a deal of time; finally, I arranged the papers so that, where there are similarities in the work area, those articles are together, but otherwise the order attempts only to provide some geographical variety.

Characteristics in common

From their articles, it is clear these authors share several characteristics. They were willing to take a risk by going into the unknown (and some of the work environments must have needed some nerve, initially).

All have eagerly extended their skills. When assigned unexpected tasks by an employer who was unused to a Health Information Manager’s normal duties, these Health Information Managers coped cheerfully, but many also managed, over time, to mould their jobs to suit (one author told me that, when first starting her job, her responsibilities included building security, a task she accepted and only shed later on).

The enthusiasm these Health Information Managers display in their work is inspiring. Brendon Gardner’s article takes the breath away, as he had only five days for his project (and it was just days before the birth of his first son), while the other writers had longer time-frames.

All these authors come across as modest, but we can read between the lines; their employers are happy with their recruiting because all these Health Information Managers really display the ability to deliver (par don the pun, Brendon).

One common response when I requested an article was, ‘Yes, I’ll write something, as I’d like to encourage other HIMs into this area’; several writers tell us they have already had success in this. While hospitals will always remain a major area for Health Information Manager employment, I hope this set of articles will encourage HIMs to consider non-traditional areas of work as well. And if these articles should fall into the hands of a potential non-traditional employer, perhaps more HIM jobs could be created.

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