Welcome to the new-look, hard copy Health Information Management Journal! Well, it is not such a new look because this journal had its beginnings over 35 years ago and was published in hard copy format until late 2000. Regardless of the format, since its inception the journal has been the key communication vehicle for the ideas, theories, innovations, and professional practice issues affecting Health Information Managers throughout Australasia. A peer-reviewed journal is one of the hallmarks of a profession and, throughout its lifetime, this journal has reflected and represented the growth and development of the profession and its knowledgebase.

The journal was established in February, 1971 as the bi-monthly National Newsletter of the Australian Federation of Medical Record Librarians (AFMRL), the antecedent of the Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA). Ms Judith Young, the President of the association, wrote an introduction to the first issue that emphasised the need for the emerging profession to establish a united, national image and identity, with national ethics and standards, and a common voice with which to seek and receive international recognition. She asked all members of the profession to support the newsletter by submitting to the Editor articles, letters, ideas, and suggestions on any topic related to the field (Young 1971: p. 1, cited by Watson 2005).

In 1975, there was a change of name to Australian Medical Record and a shift to a small-size, journal format which continued until 1983. In the following ten years, to 1993, the journal adopted a larger size and a slight name change, Australian Medical Record Journal. In 1994, it morphed into a more contemporary ‘look’ as Health Information Management Journal (HIMJ). In 2000, the Board of Directors advised the Editorial Board of the need to cut costs because of severe financial pressures facing the Association; the journal was considered to be a critical plank of the profession and the best way to preserve it and to maintain publication of a number of issues each year was to cease hard copy production and publish electronically. The Editorial Board saw this as presenting an opportunity, for a profession that operates at the forefront of electronic health communications technology, to adopt an appropriate medium for communicating professional issues and developments.

The electronic journal has been wonderful for students, researchers, and international colleagues: the immediacy of this format has enhanced accessibility to these groups. Conversely, it has also had its critics: for some readers the effort involved in accessing the internet and using a complex password has been a deterrent to reading the journal. Others have found the electronic format created a real sense of reduced ‘visibility’ of the journal and the ‘disappearance’ of the key symbol of their membership of the professional association. Many Australian Health Information Managers, while enthusiastically developing and embracing high-level information and communications technologies (ICT) in their workplaces, prefer to read an ‘old-fashioned’ print journal. The hard copy journal seems to be more accessible, more user-friendly, and easier for readers to browse through, at leisure.

The Editorial Board will produce three, slightly larger hard copy issues per year and will continue to publish the ‘Contents’ page and the peer reviewed articles in an electronic format; this is necessary for the rapid and wide dissemination of important ideas and developments in Australasian health information management and its sub-disciplines. It is also important, for the reputation of the profession and the growth of the professional knowledgebase, that articles (especially those that are peer-reviewed) are read widely and cited by...
authors in other journals, nationally and internationally. In recent years, we have encouraged contributions from experts and colleagues around the world, and the journal’s international profile will continue to be raised. The journal will also continue to be listed on CINAHL and other key databases and is being re-listed on Medline. This means that the content is accessible to anybody in the world who researches the library databases for health information management-related literature.

A great deal of time, talent and energy is required to produce the journal, mostly on a voluntary basis. A dedicated Editorial Board of experienced professionals provides the strategic direction. The state branch representatives (state liaison officers: SLOs) use their considerable networking skills to solicit articles from their home states and territories. There are several Associate Editors, whose role is to support the Editor by taking shared responsibility for the content of one issue per annum. The secretary to the Editorial Board undertakes essential recording. The Managing Editor is responsible for all of the behind-the-scenes editing, formatting, and management of the production process. Others who contribute to each issue include the marketing expert who communicates with the advertisers, the design expert who prepares the layout, the printer who produces the final product, and the HIMAA webmaster who uploads and maintains the electronic component. In addition, there are anonymous reviewers who are experts in the sub-disciplines of health information management; they are called upon by the Editor to act as referees for the peer-reviewed articles. It is this latter component which elevates HIMJ to its status as a ‘real’ professional journal.

The readers and contributors are critical to the journal’s continuing success. We invite you and your colleagues in Australia and internationally – Health Information Managers, Clinical Coders, Health Informaticians, and others - to share the stories of your plans, implementations, challenges, successes, and disasters. Reading about others’ experiences helps to inform one’s decision-making. We have revamped some of the categories; if you wish to write a case study, a commentary, a report, your professional profile, or a researched article, remember that others across the country and around the world will be interested in reading it. If you wish to submit photographs of your work or equipment, we will publish these in the ‘all-new’ Photo Gallery. Take a look at the ‘Guidelines for Authors’ elsewhere in this issue and on the HIMAA website, journal webpage. We welcome your views regarding the content. Enjoy reading your journal!

Kerin Robinson
Editor

References