Halina Hili: From Health Information Manager to Quality Manager

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Introduction
After spending some years in the health information management industry, I began to appreciate that the skills learned during my undergraduate days in the lecture theatres housed within the hallowed walls of the old Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences in Melbourne had provided a rich and ‘jet-propelled’ start to a continuous, dynamic and challenging career.

I graduated in health information management many years ago and now have over 25 years experience working in areas of healthcare that include health IT, health records, and project and quality management. Accreditation in the acute, rehabilitation, primary and aged care sectors has been a major focus of my career since the mid-1990s, intertwined with quality improvement in all levels of health care and for all calibres of staff.

Projects and quality management
At the beginning of my career I really had no preconception of the diverse and specialised areas in which I would be working. Over time I managed to gain vast experience in a variety of settings, particularly in IT, patient management protocols and legal compliance systems at the training and customer service levels. I suspect that I was not destined to be a traditional clinical coder or departmental manager, but nevertheless acknowledge that time spent in both of these earlier roles have been important in developing my core skill background. They have enabled me to initiate many small projects and progress to a quality management role. A generalist clinical coding and management experience equipped me to competently pursue detailed and often innovative work that, in conjunction with my health information background, underscored the move towards quality and project management.

As a departmental manager in medical records I was keen to assist in ensuring compliance to acute hospital accreditation. I was given the opportunity to become involved with preparation for accreditation on behalf of senior managers. And so it began: with a small project outside the general scope and jurisdiction of my original medical record manager role, I investigated the tasks and ran with the project. The Director of Nursing was an excellent mentor, encouraging me to re-focus my career, thus gaining additional knowledge and skills that led to a healthcare consultancy and eventually a move to quality management in the rehabilitation and community streams.

Community focus and ambulatory services
Whilst at Dandenong District Division of General Practice I assisted our clinics in implementing the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) standards for accreditation, new national privacy legislation and related practice enhancement projects.
In 2000 I was the recipient of the Quality Award from Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited (AGPAL) for ongoing assistance to these general practices, through the provision of practice resource materials and accreditation support mechanisms. An honour indeed! I was then given the opportunity to expand my knowledge base in accreditation systems and also learned more about community ambulatory based health care. Through this experience it became clear to me that GPs (general practitioners) are staunch gatekeepers to the rest of the medical system and are vocal advocates for improving services for home based patients. Not all health care is based on an inpatient bed.

I particularly enjoyed visiting a range of general practices in the south-east areas of Melbourne, and seeing variations in record systems ranging from basic manual systems to impressive PC-based paperless office regimes. It was both valuable and interesting to be able to provide close support, education and health information updates via email, telephone or one-to-one visits and group education sessions, whether for sole GPs or in large clinics employing many doctors and administrative staff.

Accreditation
As a keen quality management professional I have enjoyed developing, implementing and evaluating quality improvement systems in rehabilitation services, community based GP Division programs, private hospitals and, more recently, endoscopy centres in Melbourne. Working with external accreditation providers for the Australian Council of Healthcare Standards (ACHS) Evaluation and Quality Improvement Program (EQuIP), Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency (ACSSA) and AGPAL for GP accreditation, I have enjoyed developing and presenting tailored education programs. I have also worked with managers to devise annual Quality Plans, quality audits, consumer satisfaction surveys and documented annual self assessments, to determine compliance levels for health care standards.

The desire for service improvement is inherent within all our work. The challenge is to inspire managers to devote a little of their time to thinking about their Quality Plans, then to assist them in their documentation, teach them to use the latest resources and local tools, and finally support their staff in actively carrying out reviews, evaluations and follow-up processes.

Consumer liaison
One of the more rigorous roles in which I had the pleasure of assisting managers was as a consumer liaison officer. In reality, this is better described as ‘complaints manager’. Now there is an area that requires some negotiation and investigative skills! To be able to deal on a one-to-one basis with patients and their families can be time consuming and one must be fully informed about the medico-legal and situational aspects of each case. Patient issues demand the highest priority, ahead of all other work tasks. I learned to document every contact and aimed to achieve a good result for every patient.

I have been fortunate in realising all my working goals including:

- managing a unique medical record department with enthusiastic staff support for the soon-to-be-bursting ambulatory home health services, the Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS)
- working with health, IT and business professionals who had enormous talent and the conviction to improve health services
- participating in exciting and innovative health IT systems development, implementation and training for inpatient and community health care
Professional profiles

- successfully moving into project work and a healthcare consultancy
- facilitating consumer-focused participation in various healthcare environments
- assisting health staff develop and use quality improvement knowledge in a practical way to improve their daily work operations
- working in diverse health sectors that included public, private, inpatient, rehabilitation, aged care, domiciliary community and ambulatory care
- mentoring health information management students who have emerged as confident and capable health management professionals.

In the health information profession we always have opportunities to broaden our skills and I have just changed direction again. From a career in quality management in rehabilitation and aged care, based at Kingston Centre within Southern Health, I have recently moved to Monash BreastScreen to take up the position of Senior Health Information Manager. Here the comprehensive screening processes have detailed quality controls at every point, that assures clients and health professionals alike that, ‘no stone is unturned’ in this delicate women’s health breast cancer early detection program.

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