

## HEALTH LIBRARIANSHIP WORKFORCE PLAN LAUNCHED

For the past two years the Health Libraries Australia group (HLA), supported by a small grant from ALIA, has been engaged in a research project with two main objectives: to determine the future skills requirements for the health library workforce in Australia and to develop a structured, modular education framework (post-graduate qualification and continuing professional development structure) for health librarians to meet these requirements.

The first objective was achieved with the launch of the project report at the New Librarians Symposium in Perth on 18 September 2011. Four of the project team, Cheryl Hamill, Catherine Clark, Carol Newton-Smith and Project Leader Ann Ritchie, were on hand for the launch together with ALIA Executive Director Sue Hutley. The other members of the team, who were unable to be at the launch, include Principal Researcher Gill Hallam, Suzanne Lewis, Patrick O'Connor, Melanie Kammermann.

The report, entitled *Health Librarianship Workforce and Education: Research to Plan the Future*, is the culmination of a rigorous research methodology which included a literature review and environmental scan, online surveys of health librarians and health library managers, and semi-structured interviews with employers.

A number of critical competency areas for health librarians were identified in the research, with the highest priority given to the use of technology and systems, management of health information resources and providing information services to meet users' needs. The report was presented, and its recommendations endorsed, at the May 2011 meeting of the ALIA Board of Directors.

Recommendations include development of a framework of competency-based standards which will

delineate the scope of practice for the health library and information profession, development of a specialist postgraduate certificate and a three-year cycle of professional development activities and establishment of a certification and revalidation program for health library professionals, based on member enrolment in the ALIA Professional Development Scheme. Members of the HLA executive and the Project Reference Group are currently consulting with ALIA national office to facilitate implementation of the recommendations.

Twenty-seven percent of respondents to the survey of health librarians indicated that they would be leaving the health library sector within five years, therefore it is to be hoped that some of the delegates at the New Librarians Symposium are considering a career in health librarianship. However, currently they would find that there is no postgraduate qualification available to prepare them for entry into this specialist field, and no structured, systematic continuing professional development opportunities.

The relevant knowledge and skills required by health librarians are usually acquired informally in the workplace and through *ad hoc* continuing professional development. The launch of this report marks the first step towards ensuring the future of the profession by laying the foundation for a systematic approach to educating the health librarianship workforce of the future in Australia.

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