

35 YEARS IN ONE PLACE

As Norma Worswick prepares to retire from Ballarat Health Service her colleague Nick Higgins reflects on a career that spans 35 years in one place, but far from standing still!

When Norma Worswick was installed as Librarian at the Base Hospital's new library in 1977 she found on its shelves 51 outdated medical texts and subscriptions to just five medical journals. Thirty-five years later and on the verge of Norma's retirement, the Library has 9,764 books and subscriptions to 8,188 journals.

In her 35 years as Library Manager, Norma has ushered in the digital age and seen demands for the library's service grow, particularly over the past decade with the arrival of more medical students. When she began at the Base, Norma, who had pursued librarianship after ditching a teaching degree which she hadn't enjoyed, could not imagine remaining in the one place for five years, let alone 35!

She recalls having a few hurdles to overcome in the early years.

"My first battle was over the budget. There was no budget," she said. "My second battle was wanting to get a photocopier. The CEO at the time said they were 'fly-by-night' bits of equipment that would not be around in five years' time".

The third battle was with a matron who would open mail to the hospital regardless of the intended recipient.

"She was thrilled with me ordering nursing and medical journals, ripping out the pages she liked. I would get the journals with pages missing so I rang the publishers to ask what was happening with my journals."

Norma eventually discovered where the missing articles had gone and confronted the matron who did not take kindly to the approach. She banned Norma from entering the nurses' home to post library notices without first obtaining permission.

For 18 years Norma managed the Library on her own before a clerical assistant was appointed. The new appointment meant the library could stay open while Norma had a lunch break. These days, the Library has four staff working over three full-time positions.

Norma had the first computer in the Hospital and in the mid-1980s had a modem linked to the National Library. By the late 1980s, the library had internet access. The Library is now well resourced with IT facilities, desks and an abundance of reading material. Norma says while the internet has brought obvious benefits it has meant reduced face-to-face contact.

Retirement activities for Norma start with her stepson's wedding at Margaret River, after which she has planned a jaunt through Europe. While that's happening, husband Colin will stay at home caring for their two beloved standard poodles.

Nick Higgins
Ballarat Health Service
Manager Media and Communications



Base Hospital librarian Miss Norma Worswick arranges journals in the newly opened W. R. Griffiths Library.

THEN AND NOW – a news clipping of Norma Worswick at the 1977 opening of the Ballarat Base Hospital library (ABOVE) and in 2012 (RIGHT)

