This month in our series on ALIA Groups, we profile Health Libraries Australia (HLA). HLA is the national ALIA Group representing librarians and information professionals working in all types of health care organisations.

The HLA executive consists of 13 hardworking and committed health librarians from across Australia. We teleconference every month, and aim to meet annually for a strategic directions planning day. The HLA executive acts as the Health Library and Information Advisory Group to the ALIA Board of Directors, advising the Board on issues relating to health librarianship and helping to strengthen our participation in ALIA business.

HLA's vision is that all Australians benefit from health library and information professionals' expertise that is integral to evidence-based health care.

To realise this vision, HLA undertakes activities in five portfolios: professional development, education and training; demonstrating value (awards, research, marketing and advocacy); partnerships and collaborations; publishing and communication; and membership.

The professional development, education and training portfolio is the area in which we have seen the most sustained and regular activity. Based on the findings of the two year research project, Health Librarianship Workforce and Education (see the Final Report at bit.ly/1psNyc), we aim to develop health library professionals as part of the health information professional workforce.

The initial focus has been on using our framework of competency-based standards as a basis for a health specialist program of study, comprising a postgraduate certificate and a three year cycle of professional development.

Achievements to date have included the introduction of the health specialisation into the ALIA PD Scheme in 2012 and the Competency Mapping Project (2013) supporting health librarians to meet the requirements of the PD Scheme. In conjunction with Queensland University of Technology we are designing an online course, Essentials of Health Librarianship, which will become part of a post graduate specialist program of study. HLA also organises an annual professional development day event.

A new online Journal Club has been launched with immediate uptake from enthusiastic contributors to the online discussions, which focus on recent journal articles in the health library literature. The results are used to produce evidence summaries which are, in turn, published in HLA News.

The demonstrating value portfolio is concerned with demonstrating the value of health libraries and the health library and information professionals. Our approach focuses on researching and generating evidence and hard data about the economic value and contribution of health library services and health librarian skills, marketing our skills and communicating with our clients and employers so that we are perceived as valuable in their eyes and using this evidence and these perceptions of value to advance health librarianship and influence policy.

In 2013, HLA (ALIA), with Health Libraries Inc, commissioned an independent study of economic value. The results suggest that hospitals, government departments, associations and other organisations involved in healthcare gain a $9 return for every dollar they invest in health libraries. Advocacy work like this continues to be at the forefront of our minds.
HLA administers two awards: the HLA/HCN Innovation and Excellence Award, which acknowledges an innovation that has improved access to health information and health care (practical outcomes) and the Anne Harrison Award, recognising research that will increase the understanding of, or explore potential development in health librarianship in Australia.

HLA is in the process of establishing both formal and informal partnerships and collaborations with a number of groups. Current agreements exist with the Medical Libraries Association (MLA, USA) and HISA (Health Informatics Society of Australia) and we are developing relationships with other groups.

As a result of the Workforce and Education Research Project and the last Anne Harrison Award project (a census of health library professionals in Australia), we have been working with the former health agency Health Workforce Australia to assist in planning for the health information professional workforce for the future. We are also interested in gaining recognition through the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) as a ‘self-regulating’ profession.

The HLA News/National Bulletin is the main communication tool for the group. It is a quarterly publication which informs our communities of current news, events, changes and areas of relevance to health librarianship with the aim of promoting evidence-based practice and advancing the vision of ‘knowledge to improve health’.

In 2014 HLA launched a monthly HLA Alerts service. This is delivered directly to the inbox of HLA members and carries short snippets to update our members with the latest relevant information. We are also currently in the process of a major overhaul of our website. We have a LinkedIn group and are discussing how we can use social media to market ourselves and improve two-way communication between members.

Membership is a newly formed portfolio, which aims to ensure that we know who our members are, so that we can hear their views and serve them better. We are implementing a position to take responsibility for communicating with members and updating our mailing lists.

If you have any questions, ideas or want to get involved, please contact the Committee. Details and links to resources above can be found on our webpage at www.alia.org.au/groups/HLA.

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AWARD LEADS TO NEW SEARCH TRAINING TOOL

CareSearch Palliative Care Knowledge Network, with support from Flinders Filters and Health Libraries Australia, has created an online self-paced set of modules for librarians and researchers who would like to enhance and test their literature searching skills.

The Smart Searching: Logical Steps to Building and Testing Your Literature Search modules are available at sites.google.com/site/smartssearchinglogical/home and include tips and tricks derived from the methodology used at CareSearch to develop topical search filters.

The steps outlined include techniques designed to help test and improve searches and the developers hope they will give librarians and researchers a way to provide evidence of the effectiveness of their searching.

This resource was developed at CareSearch as an outcome of the 2012 ALIA HLA/HCN Health Informatics Innovation Award. Feedback, comments and suggestions can be sent to Sarah Hayman, Research Fellow (Evidence), CareSearch Palliative Care Knowledge Network, Flinders University. Contact Sarah at sarah.hayman@flinders.edu.au.

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