

## **Introducing Library and Information students to the joys of health librarianship**

On 19 October 2020, four members of the HLG Committee took part in a virtual gathering of library students from University College London to talk about health librarianship, what it entails, and what you can get from the experience. The four who took part each come from a different area of health librarianship (Community NHS, Hospital-based NHS, Third Sector and Higher Education), and they all have different experiences of the work they do. Here, they each discuss their experience of the event.

### **Lesley Allen**

On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October I was one of four volunteers from HLG who gathered (virtually, of course) to talk with some UCL library students about working in health libraries. Looking back at my own time studying for a library qualification, the main focus seemed to be on public, academic or the unspecified 'special' libraries. I knew nothing about health libraries or many other specialist types of service when I ventured out into the world of work. Granted this was longer ago than I care to remember, but this struck me as an ideal opportunity to encourage future LKS professionals to consider working in the varied field that is health libraries.

We had been briefed by Alison Hicks in advance and knew what questions she was going to pose, but there was also time for students to pose their own questions of us. We were able to talk about how we came to be working in health libraries, what our careers had been like, and the rich variety of things we did that we didn't imagine we would be doing at the beginning of our careers. For instance, my interest was

always in working in children's libraries, but I started in health on a 6 month temporary contract and here I am over 30 years later! I was keen to emphasise how important it was to take up opportunities when they arose as you never know quite where things will lead and what will progress your career. We were also able to talk about the many benefits that being an HLG member can bring to student members, and hopefully will have made some of the students present think about a career in health libraries.

### **Lynsey Hawker**

I was very pleased to be asked to attend the panel event with HLG Colleagues in October, a great opportunity to share our experiences on working in health libraries. Each of the four of us got to share a little of our careers to date, how we got into libraries and the paths that brought us to our current roles. What really struck me is that there is no one way of becoming a health librarian and once you are there are so many different opportunities available. Each of the panel work in different types of library within the sector including the NHS, academic libraries or in my case for a health charity. While we all talked about skills specific health, I hope we also highlighted the variety that also comes with these roles, the things that make the job special. For example, I never expected to get to run a book group or facilitate walking tours as part of my job! It was also great to be able to highlight the role HLG can offer to students and new professionals, providing a network of support, learning and expertise to those just starting out in their career. It was brilliant to see so many students attend the online session and I hope we persuaded at least a few to consider joining the world of health librarianship!

## Phillip Barlow

On Monday 19 October, I was privileged to be able to attend, in my capacity as a member of the Health Libraries Group (HLG) Committee, an event held by University College London for their Library and Information Studies students, on the joys of being a health librarian. This was an event originally scheduled for March, until certain events got in the way. So, having gotten used to the idea of doing everything, including holding meetings and events, online, myself and three of my colleagues from HLG – Lesley Allen from Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust, Emma Ramstead from Croydon Health Services NHS Trust, and Lynsey Hawker from the King's Fund, all representing different areas of health librarianship – congregated on Zoom as a panel, moderated by Professor Alison Hicks, to discuss our roles and how we ended up where we are; the things we do and like about our current roles; and our advice for new professionals. This isn't the first time I've done something like this, as I have had the opportunity to speak to newly qualified professionals in the past about being a health librarian, and, as then, it made me think about the things I do as part of my job, and what it is about it that, even after having been in my role for a not inconsiderable amount of time, I still enjoy about it. As with all such events, there were perceptive questions at the end that made the four of us think hard about the answers. It was a worthwhile experience, and I would advise anyone who may have the opportunity to take part in such an event to consider doing so. Particularly if you get the opportunity, having been complimented on your purple and blue background, to point out that it is claret and blue, having bored everyone senseless before the start of the session with stories of coming back from a three-goal deficit in the last eight minutes of the game the previous day.

**Emma Ramstead**

On Monday the 19th October, I attended a University College London (UCL) event to talk to library students about my role as a health librarian. I was joined by three other colleagues from the HLG committee and we were asked questions by Professor Alison Hicks.

The event really made me step back and look at my career, track how my skills had developed, whilst being a health librarian. As well as helping the student librarians, it helped me to assess and review. I started out as an outreach librarian in East Surrey and West Sussex. I had a break from librarianship, when I worked as an Information Specialist for Hearst Health. My time at Hearst Health taught me to take a very thorough approach and question everything. When I started working as a Deputy library manager in 2017 as a health librarian, I was able to develop on these skills.

My colleagues all came to health librarianship from different routes but what became clear to me was that we all wished to develop the skills we had gained along the way and continue to learn and develop more. I promoted joining a specialist interest group or a regional group because it gives you the opportunity to gain skills that you may not be able to use in your day job. As the Treasurer of Health Libraries Group (HLG), I am writing reports and creating budgets. This is something I do not get to do every day but I am hoping it will help me, in my future development.

This was a very worthwhile event, I felt it was a fruitful hour and I would advise other health librarians and students to attend and take part.