



NURSING LIBRARIANSHIP DOWN UNDER: NEWS FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Judy Till

I was asked recently to put down a few thoughts about nursing librarianship in South Australia. I rather foolishly agreed and then discovered there was very little research about the nursing librarianship scene in South Australia or Australia. I will therefore attempt to briefly describe the situation.

First some geographical information. South Australia is the southernmost state in mainland Australia and supports a population of approximately 1.2 million, 80-90% of whom live in the capital city, Adelaide. The climate is known as Mediterranean, warm to hot dry summers and mild, wet winters.

The city of Adelaide supports three Universities with a total student population of approximately 42,000. The University of South Australia is the biggest institution with around 22,000 students, and educates the most nursing students (c. 2,000) which are spread over three sites. Flinders University of South Australia also runs a course for nurses with approximately 1,000 pre-registration and post graduate students.

The transfer of nurse education to the higher education sector started in 1978 with 200 students at the Sturt campus of Flinders University and was completed in 1990 when the last intake of hospital trained nurses took place. The University of South Australia (known then as the South Australian Institute of Technology) had its first intake of students in 1987 at the City campus.

The transfer of nurse education saw a complete transfer from the hospital sector with students being based at a University campus. A number of reports on nursing education in the sixties and seventies agreed that traditional hospital-based schools were no longer appropriate venues for nursing education. There was a need for courses to promote a holistic, health-oriented approach to nursing practice with the art and science of caring as the major focus. The current system is primarily university-based coursework and hospital-based clinical education. The student nurses attend classes on campus, are trained in skills laboratories and undertake placements in a variety of health settings. First year students observe in community settings and undertake health assessments of students from local primary schools. Second and third year students are

exposed to clinical settings in a range of hospital environments as well as community health centres.

The transfer of nursing students to the higher education sector necessitated the need for a specialist librarian to be employed in the existing University library to cater for these students. At present there are three nursing librarians at the City, Underdale and Salisbury campus of the University of South Australia and one at the Sturt campus of Flinders University. Seeding grants for the purchase of resources were given at my campus (City) from 1987 to 1991 (approximately \$A40,000 to \$A60,000 per year) when we were part of the South Australian Institute of Technology. In 1991 this institution merged with the South Australian College of Advanced Education to form the University of South Australia which brought Underdale, Salisbury and City campus together. The Faculty of Nursing was formed in 1992.

The role of the Nursing Librarian in this new University has expanded from the days when it was necessary to purchase resources quickly to cater for the large numbers of students. Most of the workload now is centred around library orientation, CD-Rom instruction and mastering the Internet. With first year numbers at about 150-200 per campus, library orientation programmes have had to be developed with these numbers in mind. At City campus I developed a workbook for first year students for the first few years but this year I collaborated with study skills lecturers and nursing staff to produce an overall guide to information needed by first year students. It included a library component, exam and essay preparation and examples of best practice in reflective journal writing and article reviews.

The integration of information seeking skills into the nursing course has been the ambition of all the nursing librarians at the University of South Australia. The course is supported by a common curriculum but each campus has interpreted the material to be covered. Here at City there has always been an emphasis on anatomy, physiology and biological sciences but the students also get grounding in the social and behavioural sciences. Library sessions are timed to coincide with major assignments to maximize their usefulness and emphasis is placed on transferring these skills to other subjects and situations.

Students are normally offered an orientation session at the beginning of the first year. Although the library catalogue (DYNIX) is demonstrated, the most important feature of these sessions is first contact with the librarian. A friendly approach at this point will encourage students to feel that the library is not so daunting. With the advent of multimedia technology in schools, students are becoming



more comfortable with technology and sessions lately have been more about the particular features of the library product rather than spending time on introducing the technology. CD-Rom sessions usually follow in second semester of the first year with self paced CD-Rom guides available to students at any time. Further sessions are introduced on a needs basis at various times throughout the three year course.

Technological support for nursing students is good and will improve by the end of 1995. There are 10 networked workstations at present in the City campus library where students can access CINAHL, Medline and other relevant CD-Roms. Recently this network has expanded to the student computer pools at the City campus. Instruction in the use of CINAHL and other CD-Roms can now take place in these computer pools which should increase the student's confidence with these products.

Library staff all have networked computers with access to most CD-Rom products, library catalogue, email and the Internet. Communication between the library and the nursing school staff is either electronic or committee representation. Internet training sessions are currently underway for nursing staff conducted by the library's electronic information team. In the near future it will be possible to link these staff to relevant CD-Rom products although it is possible now for them to access Current Contents, email and the library catalogue.

The future for the Faculty of Nursing lies in building its research profile and attracting nursing students from overseas. There are collaborative programs with local hospitals and a new Professional Chair in clinical nursing in conjunction with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital has just been announced. The Faculty has won contracts to develop and manage nursing, health and administration programs for government and private organisations in Malaysia and Indonesia. Graduate Diplomas in acute care, community health nursing, aged care, midwifery, occupational health and safety and psychiatric/mental health nursing have been running for a number of years and Masters and PhD programs are on track as well. These will be expanded and externalised for the international and local market in the near future.

Nursing in South Australia has come a long way from its first forays into the higher education sector in the late 1970s. The development of a Centre for Research into Nursing and Health Care (CRNHC) which is one of the University's centres of excellence assures the Faculty has a future in the higher education sector. Its high profile

amongst health providers makes it well placed to influence the direction of health care in South Australia in years to come.

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