Strip: Sector News

Heading: Supporting the frontline

Intro: When Austin Health started planning its response to COVID-19, senior hospital staff made it clear to Michele Gaca, Chief Librarian, that the library was a key part of the hospital's pandemic response team. Michele sent us this report the first week of April.

Body:

At Austin Health (as I am sure is the case with all hospital libraries) we are in a position of trust, and looked upon as specialists in our field of finding and organising information.

One of the Library team's biggest tasks has been filtering the overwhelming amount of information and noise being created around this public health crisis. We created a webpage ([COVID-19 Research](#)) that we regularly update, providing a single place for clinicians to look. As enough evidence presented itself we created a special issue of our fortnightly *Bulletin*. Both the webpage and the [special issue](#) received over 2,000 hits within 7 days.

One of the services we provide is reviewing hospital policies, procedures and guidelines on a monthly basis. We were asked if we could now commit to a 24 hour turnaround, so effectively we were now on call 24/7. This work involves reading all documents as a non-clinical editor, checking they are based on the latest evidence, and fixing citations and links. In the space of 21 days we reviewed and enhanced 12 new COVID-19 policies.

Just when I thought we couldn't get busier, I was asked to participate as a panelist on Austin Health's weekly COVID-19 global webinar. Literature searches increased as did requests for document delivery, since many other libraries have closed. We hold a comprehensive print

collection with many of Australia's last copies, which also puts us in a position of high demand.

Switching to remote management and support of a team who are used to working in close proximity can be a challenge - particularly in a time of high environmental stress and isolation, and occasional technology issues. It's a skill to compartmentalise the stressful feelings, so that we can focus on what needs to be done for our clinicians.

Although the situation is difficult and requests come in thick and fast, quality is still important. Our clinicians are experts at what they do, but they rely on us as experts in our field of information management.

Clinicians are still coming to use the physical space to catch up on work away from the ward. We are a large space so social distancing is very feasible. It is my hope that we are bringing a little operational normality in this chaotic time, and we are the friendly face that asks how they are faring in difficult situations.

It is great that our hospital has seen its library as a strength in a time of rapid response. Health librarians may not be on the frontline, but we are right behind those who are. They see us staying calm, working smart, delivering within timeframes and maintaining our reputation around quality output, supporting the essential, life-saving work that our clinicians do. [INCITE COLOPHON]

Michele Gaca AALIA (CP) Health
Chief Librarian, Health Sciences Library
Austin Health & Mercy Hospital for Women