

# Hospital patient libraries and information services in Australia

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## Abstract

*In order to find out how many and what kind of Hospital Patient Libraries exist in Australia I placed a "Request for Information" on our national electronic discussion list entitled 'aliaHealth'. This discussion list has presently nearly 300 subscribers. Most of them are located in Australia, but they also come from Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The e-mail address for 'aliaHealth' is: aliaHealth@alianet.alia.org.au*

*The result of my enquiry was rather poor: there are three Hospital Patient Libraries in Western Australia, one in Queensland and two in Victoria. The criterion was that the Library or Patient Information Service had to be located within the Hospital grounds. The six Libraries or Information Services are described in detail.*

## Overview

There are two kinds of Patient Libraries in Australia. First, there is the library that is attached to a Hospital for the recreational use by patients. Such a library will stock mainly fictional material with a small collection of reference material.

The second is a Hospital Patient Library where patients borrow books and videos about health issues and acquire information on specific conditions, diseases and treatment options. In Western Australia there is one Hospital Patient Library of the first type, and there are two of the second type. In Queensland the patient library is of the second type and the two in Victoria are a combination of both categories.

The lack of Hospital Patient Libraries in Australia can be attributed to the fact that above nearly all hospital beds individual television monitors have been mounted for easy viewing by patients. The patient can usually chose from a multitude of commercial or in-house channels.

At King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women I am responsible for our 'Health Information Channel KTV-5'. A patient can switch on Channel 5 and will be 'bombarded' with health information for 12 hours per day. We have a two-day program that automatically repeats itself after that time. The information is predominantly about women's health issues and parenting, but also contains some general information such as information on skin cancer, domestic violence and physical education.

Another reason for the lack of Hospital Patient Libraries in Australia may be the government's policy to discharge patients as early as practicable. Where possible or necessary, home care will be organised for patients who need follow up care. At King Edward Memorial Hospital the average length of stay for normal birth is 2.72 days, but when high risk and caesarian sections are included the average length of stay is 3.99 days. For gynecological patients the average length of stay is 2.24 days.

The majority of Hospitals in Australia have volunteers who provide a 'trolley service' for patients. The trolleys are usually stocked with donated books and journals. The material is neither catalogued nor stored in any order and quite often the patients don't return any items they have borrowed.

## Geographical considerations

In 1999 the population in Australia was 19 million spread over 7,682,300 sq km, or 2.5 persons per sq km. The total population of Western Australia was 1,861,000 over an area of 2,525,500 sq km, or 0.74 persons per sq km. There are 1,364,200 persons living in the Perth Metropolitan Area.

The estimated population of Aborigines & Torres Strait Islanders was 427,094 in 1999 for the whole of Australia of whom 61,505 or 14.4% living in Western Australia.

Most of Australia's population is concentrated in two widely separated coastal regions. By far the largest of these, in terms of area and population, lies in the south east and east. The smaller of the two regions is in the southwest of the continent. In both coastal regions the population is concentrated in urban centres, particularly the State and Territory capital cities.

Western Australia is the largest State in the world with only ten whole countries being bigger than Western Australia. The land distance from north to south is 2,391 km and the land distance from east to west is 1,621 km. King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and Princess Margaret Hospital for Children are the only hospitals in Western Australia to provide specialised services to women and children. Our potential patients may live near Broome in the north, Kalgoorlie in the east, or Albany in the south.

## Health care services for patients from remote areas

The Royal Flying Doctor Service provides aero-medical emergency and primary health care services together with communication and education assistance to people who live, work and travel in Australia's remote outback. The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) provides a 24 hours a day emergency service for victims of illness or accident who are in a serious or potentially life threatening condition. In these circumstances a flying doctor or flight nurse is on board the aircraft. The RFDS also transfers patients between small remote area hospitals and major city hospitals. RFDS doctors and flight nurses also conduct regular clinics at isolated sites. Services include routine health checks and advice, immunisation, child health care, dental, eye and ear clinics. Consultations are also conducted by doctors and nurses via two-way radio or telephone to people at remote outposts. During the year 2000 the Western Australian Branch of the Royal Flying Doctors flew the equivalent of six times to the Moon and back. Its Internet address is <http://www.refds.org.au>

Another important service is the Hospital Liaison for Aboriginal People. Many Aborigines living in the outback feel totally lost and bewildered in the "Big Smoke" as they call Perth. Lifts in hospital buildings become stumbling blocks to visit relatives, especially as many buildings don't have easy access staircases to higher floors and confined spaces are unknown to Aboriginal people who live a rather nomadic life. The Hospital Liaison for Aboriginal People consists of three nurses who visit all five major teaching hospitals in Perth. The nurses' roles include the following.

1. Visit Aboriginal patients from remote and country areas.
2. Assist in minimising culture shock.
3. Help to maximise nursing and medical care.
4. Act as patient advocate.
5. Relay condition reports to community nurses in the appropriate regions.
6. Participate in discharge planning and arrange travel for Aboriginal patients returning home or to hospital.
7. Arrange follow-up care with Community Health Services staff.
8. Act as link between hospital staff, patient, family and Community Health Services.
9. Arrange accommodation for Aboriginal people travelling to Perth for medical care.
10. Arrange accommodation and transport for Aboriginal people being discharged to hostels who have further appointments.
11. Arrange transfer of Aboriginal bodies above the 26th parallel (about 900 km north of Perth).
12. Encourage Aboriginal people to be independent and responsible for their own health care.
13. Provide health education relative to their medical condition.
14. Arrange escorts as required for Aboriginal patients returning home or going to hospital.

The outside world believes that the Australian Government does not treat Aborigines very well. The Hospital Liaison for Aboriginal People program shows that we are trying to help Aborigines and to improve their health and life expectancy.

### **The Library and Information Service of Western Australia (LISWA)**

At this point I need to explain the set-up of the public library system in Western Australia. LISWA provides the bulk of the book stock to all public libraries in Western Australia. The various Councils provide the building, staffing, some books and all magazine subscriptions. The book stock is rotated every six weeks from location to location. The Council Librarian can choose the majority of the books. The rest is allocated by LISWA. <http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au>

## **Individual Library and Information Services**

### **Graylands Patient Library**

Graylands Hospital is a public facility for psychiatric patients. It has 283 beds and 795 employees. The majority of patients stay much longer than in a general hospital. The Patient Library is a small public library with the majority of the book stock being provided by LISWA. Graylands Hospital pays for some books and a number of magazine subscriptions. It also pays for the facilities and the salary of the Librarian.

The Library is open for 6.30 hours per day on weekdays. The collection consists of fiction, including large print volumes, non-English language fiction, and talking books. There is also a non-fiction section, which covers self-help, layman's level of various mental disorders, drugs, religion, a section on arts and crafts and a reference collection. An extensive brochure collection is also maintained. Any patient or staff member of Graylands Hospital has access to the Library and patrons can request books via inter-library loan from LISWA. The Librarians visit closed wards with a selection of books on a regular basis. 'Closed wards' are those wards where the patient is normally not allowed outside the ward.

### **Epworth Hospital**

Epworth Hospital is a private hospital located in Victoria. It has 498 beds and 1068 employees. A 'Recreational Reading Library for Patients' was set up in 1990 as part of the Medical Library. One room has been set aside that patients can visit. There is also a 'book trolley service' which visits the wards three times a week. A team of volunteers runs this service. When no volunteers are available, patients may ring the Medical Library and library staff will visit the patient with a selection of books. Patients can also ask for health information that is provided by the Medical Library. However, any information taken to the patient on the ward is passed first to their nurse. The patient is advised to discuss the information provided with their doctor or nurse.

### **Maroondah Hospital**

Maroondah Hospital is located in Victoria. It is a combined general and psychiatric public hospital with 245 beds and 773 employees. The Patient Library is housed in the same area as the main Library, but is staffed by seven volunteers. The collection consists mainly of approximately 1000 books of fiction and magazines. The magazines are supplied by local newsagents, who provide the Hospital with their unsold stock. The magazines are new, but the front cover is removed. After three months the magazines are discarded. There are also vertical files with broad subject headings that contain information suitable for patient use. The hospital pays for books and subscriptions, including a publication called "Home Health Fact File" which are two-page sheets with basic information on a range of health topics which patients find very useful.

### **The Wesley Healthwise Centre**

Wesley Hospital is a private general hospital in Brisbane, Queensland. It has 432 beds and 1200 employees. The Wesley Healthwise Centre was established in 1996 with the aim to provide a quality health information and education service that enables their patients, staff and the community to make informed decisions about their

health. The Centre also refers consumers to support and self-help groups and other health care providers. The information provided by the Centre does not imply recommendation or endorsement and the Centre takes no responsibility for the content of Internet sites that link from the Healthwise website.

The Centre claims that its collection of books, journals, videos, pamphlets and websites are consumer friendly, up-to-date, authoritative and where possible, Australian. The Centre encourages the public to come and browse or ask for information. Photocopying facilities are available, but the Centre does not lend any material.

The Centre has thousands of brochures and pamphlets on a wide range of topics. Many of those pamphlets are produced by doctors, nurses, dietitians and physiotherapists working at the Wesley Hospital. Other pamphlets are from reputable community organisations such as the Queensland Cancer Fund, the National Heart Foundation and many other organisations. General topics covered include the following:

- Breast Cancer
- Nutrition
- Heart Health
- Food Safety
- Kidney Problems
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Community Services
- Palliative Care

The Centre also has a good collection of videos on a wide range of topics. A video player is available in the Centre where the public can view programs from the collection. It sells the following products:

- Cookery Books
- Health Books Series. These books offer a wide range of titles as diverse as human conditions. Each volume contains up-to-the minute information, written and produced by Australia's top medical writers and presented in a way that's easy for the layperson to understand.
- First Aid Kits suitable for home, hiking or sport and travel
- CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) key rings
- Books on parenting and child care
- Child Safety products such as bath thermometers, bottle warmers and VCR locks
- Brochures, pamphlets and facts sheets.

The Centre provides free access to the Internet or information on CD-ROM. The Librarian has book-marked many sites under broad subjects, such as cancer, women's health, nutrition, and heart disease.

Finally, the Centre is open between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on weekdays. The Internet address is <http://healthwise.wesley.com.au>

## **King Edward Memorial and Princess Margaret Hospitals**

King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and Princess Margaret Hospital for Children were administratively amalgamated in 1994. The sites are located two kilometers apart in Perth, Western Australia with a total number of 490 beds and 2300 employees. There are 220 maternity beds and 213 paediatric beds. The 60-bed Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at King Edward Memorial Hospital is the largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.

## **The Parent Collection at Princess Margaret Hospital**

The Parent Collection is part of the Medical Library and consists currently of 298 books and a whole range of pamphlets. Books written for the patient or the parents make up this collection and are prefixed with the letter "P" to indicate the location. Parents are allowed to borrow items for a period of fourteen days from this collection while their child is hospitalised at Princess Margaret Hospital. The following are illustrative titles of books in the Parent Collection:

- Care for your child: expert advice on child care from pre-birth to adolescence
- Childhood cancer: a parent's guide to solid tumor cancers
- Children with asthma: a manual for parents
- Cooking for kids the healthy way: wholesome recipes with child appeal
- Your child's recovery: a parent's guide for the child with life-threatening illness.

The Health Information Resource Service (HIRS) at King Edward Memorial Hospital

In 1989 I made a submission to the Chief Executive Officer of King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women to establish a Women's Health Information Centre at the Hospital. I envisaged it would be administered as part of the Medical Library. Unbeknown to me the Chief Social Worker also made a submission requesting a Women's Health Referral Service. Many meetings and heated discussions followed. The Chief Executive Officer called a working party consisting of the Chief Social Worker, the Patient Education Coordinator, a representative from Consumer Health Services and myself.

I am happy to report that the working party finally agreed with the major part of my submission, as follows:

1. The service would be run by a qualified librarian, not a nurse or a social worker.
2. The service would concentrate on providing information, not giving advice.
3. The service would be free and available to the whole population in Western Australia, at least via a toll-free telephone number.

The Health Information Resources Service (HIRS) was 'born' on the 1st of June 1993 with the official opening by the then Minister of Health of Western Australia. Funding was initially provided for a two-year period for the service with a grant from the National Women's Health Program and the Health Department of Western Australian, which provided sufficient money to purchase the initial stock of books, videos and other resources materials, as well as the salary for the Coordinator. As there was no space available on the main campus the Library budget from PMH and KEMH provided the funding for a transportable unit, which was located next to one of the clinic buildings and the staff car park.

The inaugural Coordinator of HIRS had her work cut out to promote the service. These are ways in which HIRS was made known to the Hospital and the community of Western Australia:

Orientation of Hospital Staff

Advertising in Community Newspapers

Advertising in the 'Yellow Pages'

Displays in Shopping Centres

The coordinator also attended meetings of several Consumer Health Groups. They included the Midlife & Menopause Support Group, the Multiple Birth Association of Western Australia, the Nursing Mothers Association of Australia, the Post Natal Depression Support Association (PNDSA), the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), and Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support (WA) (SANDS).

There were very few visitors to HIRS in the first few years, but many requests for information via the toll-free number. This meant lots of photocopying and a large chunk of the operational budget was spent on postage. Information Packages on some of the major topics of women's health were sent to Health Services and Medical Practitioners outside the Metropolitan area of Perth and in 1994 staff numbers were increased by the employment of a part-time Librarian.

## Objectives, AIMS and Operational Guidelines of HIRS

Objectives

HIRS provides information on women's health and health care to the general public and to health professionals in Western Australia.

Aims

HIRS aims to help women become better informed about their health and well-being by providing current, accurate and relevant information in non-medical language wherever possible. HIRS is a personal service. Qualified librarians don't just provide a leaflet - they try to answer each inquiry as fully as possible with the kind

of information most likely to be helpful. HIRS is a confidential service. It does not provide medical or counseling advice, but can refer clients to appropriate services as required. Students are encouraged to visit HIRS to do their own research.

#### Operational Guidelines

HIRS subject areas include general health, nutrition, exercise, mental health and well-being, sexual health and sexuality, contraception, breast care, menstruation, menopause, gynaecology, osteoporosis, pregnancy and childbirth, parenting, and social and cultural issues.

Resources include a lending library of books and videos, resources for sale, pamphlets, consumer health journals, subject files, electronic databases and posters. Translated pamphlets are available in more than forty languages.

Information requests received by phone, fax, e-mail or in person. If required, written information can be posted to clients within Western Australia free of charge. Urgent material can be faxed if necessary.

Lending service of books and videos to the patients of King Edward Memorial Hospital, the public and health professionals within the Perth Metropolitan area.

Reading tables and video viewing facilities.

Sales of resources, including health books, pregnancy books and grief resources.

Provision of details of health services, community groups, self-help groups and support groups in Western Australia.

On-line services, including access to the Internet for health information. Free pamphlets to individual clients.

Distribution of bulk pamphlets from outside agencies to departments and wards within King Edward Memorial Hospital.

Health promotion displays.

Photocopying and fax services for patients.

In 1996 HIRS became part of the Library and Information Service of the combined King Edward Memorial and Princess Margaret Hospital and in 1998 the Hospitals launched their own Internet and Intranet sites. You can visit the HIRS site at <http://www.pmke.wa.gov.au/hirs>

The relocated Health Information Resource Service

In July 1999 HIRS relocated to its current site on the main thoroughfare of the King Edward Memorial Hospital opposite the Medical Library and was opened officially by the wife of the Premier of Western Australia. At the last count the resources were divided as follows:

Books	1149
Videos	181
Pamphlets (individual titles)	959
Journals	65

Statistics have shown what a difference the new location has made. There has been a 75% increase in services provided over the last three consecutive years, resulting in an application for more staffing. In the mean time Medical Library staff members help out whenever possible.

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**Occasions of Service**


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Year	Total Number
1998	4281
1999	5797
2000	7559

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**Loans of Books and Videos**


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Year	Total Number
1998	1184
1999	1791
2000	2974

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The staff of HIRS had to deal with some very strange queries over the years. Here are three gems:

- “I’ve got rats in the House. What can I do about it?”
- “I’ve got ants on my false teeth. Is there a potion to get rid of them?”
- “How do you cook eggplants?”

## The Future

The Health Information Resource Service at King Edward Memorial Hospital is such a success that the Chief Executive of the Hospital has asked the Head of Department, Library and Information Services, to investigate the feasibility of a state wide service for Health Information and Health Promotion. Focus Group Meetings were conducted for interested persons from a wide range of related organisations and funding is being requested for a six-month period to employ a project officer to plan and cost the various ideas and proposals resulting from the Focus Group Meetings. The most likely outcome is a ‘travelling road-show’ of Health Professionals giving lectures and workshops on specific topics relating to women’s and children’s health in country towns. It is envisaged that each event would be held over a period of one week and that another ‘road-show’ would be held every six months. However, it is questionable whether the current Government will come up with the money.

## Conclusion

Hospital Patient Libraries for recreational purposes play an important role in the care of the long-term patient. I believe that there is a lot of room for improvement for Hospitals in Australia. Hospital Patient Libraries and Information Services for the provision of Health Information also play an important role as they help the patient or general public to understand how diseases can be prevented or improved by taking appropriate steps to minimise certain conditions.

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