

Strategies for the Health Information Management workforce

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Demand and supply

The adequate, consistent supply of qualified Health Information Managers (HIMs) to the hospital sector (and other parts of the healthcare system) is critical for ongoing operations and functionality.

The need and demand for HIMs have exacerbated, and have outpaced supply for some years: cumulative effect on shortages.

Projections (and common sense) based on current needs, policy and capacity within the supply stream, dictate that this dramatic increase in demand will continue into the foreseeable future.

Problem is acute in Victoria, but is present Australia-wide.

Multiple factors influence or drive demand for HIMs

***Inherent** health information management-related requirements of hospitals and the wider healthcare system.*

- **Accuracy and completeness of coded data/datasets** for research, funding, epidemiology, population health monitoring.
- **Collection, analysis, and management of health data** in all forms at institutional and state levels.
- **Casemix**: has created consistent, additional demand for HIMs in Victoria for almost two decades.
- Increasing **technologisation of health information work** and workplace.
- **Consumer awareness**, eg privacy, information access.

Multiple factors influence or drive demand for HIMs

- **Health information governance**: confidentiality, security, data quality, and reliability of 'source of truth'.
- Policies and ongoing developments in **activity-based funding**.
- Policies and ongoing developments in **e-Health**.
- **Knowledge-base and skill-set of HIMs** makes them very highly desirable: an essential commodity -
 - flexibility,
 - expertise in health classification (never underestimate this!),
 - systems knowledge,
 - understanding of the information flows,
 - ability to transition from ICT to coded data to epidemiological research to analysis to management to clinical governance to clinical trials to systems implementation to clinical database management to ...

Some observations from my own research

- HIMs do **complex technological and management work.**
- HIMs do **essential, invaluable work** for hospitals, and the healthcare system.
- HIMs often have low visibility, do **invisible work.**
- The value of HIMs' work is frequently **under-estimated.**
- Where smart CEOs and Boards understand the value of HIM work, this **value-adds**, generates **dynamism, creativity**, and an **evidence-based, information-driven environment.**

How do we make the HIM career more visible?

Collaboration between:

DoH and LTU

Employers and LTU

Profession and LTU

Strategies – what La Trobe University (LTU) is doing (1)

School Leavers:

Bachelor of Health Sciences & Master of Health Information Management (BHSc & MHIM) has replaced the BHIM.

- Compressed, 4-year double-degree: same structure as for all allied health professions at LTU.
- All LTU health courses:
 - interdisciplinary (common) 1st Year
 - specialist discipline content: Years 2-4.
- Option: early-exit, end-Yr 3, BHSc (Clinical Coder).
- Commenced 2009.

Streams or sub-disciplines of HIM study

In all our degree courses:

- Management, and Professional Practice
- Health Classification
- Health Data Analysis
- Health Informatics

Strategies – what LTU is doing (2)

Graduate-entry, **Master of Health Information Management: MHIM**

- Intensive 2-year profession-entry degree. Covers all HIM competencies.
- Commenced 2010.
- Attracts medical, nursing, allied health, plus non-health (eg IT, arts, media, ...) recent graduates or those who want a career change.
- Excellent for health professionals wanting a career shift.
- Attractive to 'International' students: good source of extra graduates for local workforce. (Note Permanent Residency/migration constraints.)

Strategies – what LTU is doing (3)

Bachelor of Information Systems & Master of Health Information Management: *BIS & MHIM*

- Four-year compressed double-degree, taught by Computer Science and HIM.
- Prepares students for health informatics-focused career, but they have all other HIM competencies.
- Problem: very low student demand for general ‘information systems/IT’ (and health informatics-related) courses.

Strategies – what LTU is doing (4)

Advanced Master degree for qualified HIMs

Master of Health Sciences (Health Information Management): *MHSc(HIM)*

- Professional development: enables qualified HIMs to update qualification, strengthen skills in specific areas, expand knowledge.
- Subjects: HIM Master level; HIM research project; plus subjects from wider School of Public Health. Under development: areas of emerging need (eg higher level health classification, auditing, costing, data analysis, ABF) .
- Optional early-exit (Grad Certificate) or proceed to full Master degree. Articulates to higher degrees (PhD or Professional Doctorate).
- Commences 2012.

Strategies – what LTU is doing (5)

Non-award (Faculty Certificate) courses

For

- Professional development: knowledge and skills update
- Acquisition of higher level professional skills (eg Coding Auditing)

and

- To alleviate workforce shortage.

Professional Development Courses:

Clinical Coding Refresher Course

A practical clinical coding course for HIMs and Clinical Coders who wish to update their abstracting and coding skills for return to work, or to health classification work.

Useful professional development for Clinical Coders.

Required - past qualification in clinical coding (eg. MRA/HIM, Nosologist, OTEN, or HIMAA course).

Online delivery and student support

Duration - 13 weeks.

Course Content - aimed at the casemix complexity level of mid-sized hospital

- Refreshes clinical coding skills and knowledge based on 2010 Seventh Edition of the *International Classification of Diseases – 10th Revision – Australian Modification (ICD-10-AM)*, *Australian Classification of Health Interventions (ACHI)* and the *Australian Coding Standards (ACS)*.
- Abstracting from the medical record
- Introduction to AR-DRGs and payment models
- Morbidity reporting systems
- Coding practices: coding in a casemix environment, coding quality, resources, coding tools.

Professional Development Courses:

Clinical Coding Auditing Course

Develops skills in:

- the auditing of coded data,
 - analysing and reporting on audit outcomes
 - developing strategies for dealing with same.
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- Covers ABF, principles of casemix, theory and principles of auditing, statistical analysis and methodology, interpreting and reporting audit outcomes.

Clinical Coding Auditing Course, con't

Distance-based, 6 mths pt-time, for:

- Competent clinical coders who currently undertake, or who wish to undertake, internal audits in their own hospitals
- Very experienced coders who wish to develop their careers in external auditing
- (External) Coding Auditors who wish to enhance their skills.

Options/levels:

- **Certificate of Internal Clinical Coding Auditing**
- **Certificate of Internal Clinical Coding Auditing – International**
- **Certificate of External & Internal Clinical Coding Auditing**

Strategies – what La Trobe University plans to do

- MHIM – online/mixed delivery to increase accessibility (depends on funding).
- Other possibilities? What is needed in medium-longer term, eg Grad Dip Clinical Coding (possible articulation to MHIM for academically able students)?
 - Note: MHIM skillset includes high level, complex coding.
- Single subject enrolment – for qualified HIMs.
- Course promotion – hospitals/CEOs.

Strategies – what La Trobe University plans to do

- Development of pathways to **BHSc & MHIM** from **TAFE** (Faculty support for this approach).
 - Note current student selection includes:
 - non-VCE Special Entry
 - TAFE-qualified applicants
 - others with HIS and related health experience.
 - Current practice includes some Advanced Standing for students who have completed HIMAA courses.

Strategies - what you can do (1)

- Advertise locally through the secondary schools and media in your region, and **sponsor a high school student through the *BHSc & MHIM* course.**
- Modest financial support, and casual/pt-time work in long vacation.
- HIM students can do Year 1 at our country campuses, move to Melb for Years 2-4.
- Option for a placement in the 'home' hospital.
- Cost-effective recruitment.
- Attractive option for students.

Strategies - what you can do (2)

- Advertise throughout your health service to **attract a health professional who wishes to change career direction within your service**, to do the MHIM.
- Offer some form of support (eg vacation work) in return for continuing employment as an HIM, upon graduation.
- Placement option at 'home' hospital.
- Emphasise: they can still 'make a difference' for patients/clients/hospital, but in another way.

Strategies - what you can do (3)

- **Sponsor a current student** – similar terms to option (2).
- A student from your region (or not): enrolled in the **Bachelor of Health Sciences & Master of Health Information Management** (4-year double degree) or in the Grad-entry **Master of Health Information Management**.
- La Trobe will promote/advertise your sponsorship within the student body. You do the selection.

Strategies - what you can do (4)

- **Continue to take students on placement, and Coding Clinics**
- Raises awareness - in those students and across the cohort/year level - of which are the 'desirable' places to work, post-graduation.
- Word travels fast through the student group!
- Students like to start networking early.

Strategies - what you can do (5)

Junior HIM/New Graduate Internship

- Advertise to the Final Year cohort (we can put it online for all enrolled students to see).
- Set out the Intern Year Programme: emphasise a rounded experience in selected areas of junior, entry-level HIM work, eg coding, privacy/FOI, staff management, casemix analysis, ..your preference.
- Incorporate regular mentoring by a more experienced HIM.
- Promote as a great opportunity to gain broad experience in a guided, supportive professional environment.

Strategies - what you can do (6)

Be represented at our annual **Profession Day**:
September.

- Or send LTU an advertisement/promo for your health service, emphasising the best aspects of the workplace, lifestyle in the area, opportunities for interesting and diverse experience in HIM, etc...
 - We will promote this to the Final Year students via our online facility.

Strategies - what you can do (7-9)

- Ask us for **Fact Sheets, flyers, to distribute** around your health service on noticeboards, in lifts, ...
- Ask for our **promotional DVD**, to lend to clinical colleagues who are potential career changers, local students.
- Send us some text about HIM work in your health service - for a **flyer for prospective students on Open Day** (Sunday, August 7 – Bundoora).

Strategies - what you can do (10)

- Attend your local secondary schools' or regional **Careers Day**.
- **Contact your local schools' Careers Teachers:** they are busy people and will appreciate getting information about a great course and career opportunities for their students, and having a local contact.
- Take students on **Work Experience**.

Strategies - what you can do (11)

- **Non-metro: call the local newspaper, ask for a photographer, give them a story** (eg when:
 - a new HIM starts,
 - you have a student on placement,
 - you introduce scanning or a new system.
- Give a simple written statement with basic facts:
 - great career;
 - lots of jobs and more, due to national health reforms;
 - how HIMs do essential work in the background that keeps the hospital solvent, and running!

It's a great course and easy to sell

but... **relatively low** immediate awareness or **recognition** compared with, say, nursing, medicine, or physiotherapy.

This means the ENTER score (for the *BHSc & MHIM*) is not as high as it should be (does not equate to difficulty of the course): can be a disincentive to high-performing Year 12 students, although we find that country students, especially, are pragmatic and will go for the career (especially with a local HIM role model) and disregard the ENTER.

Summary

Strategies to:

- **Increase and build the workforce from various levels**
- **Retain and upskill current workforce**
- **Recall and upskill lapsed workforce members**
- **Elevate awareness of course and career**
- **Entice graduates and students/future graduates to commit to work for you**
- **Tell the world—it's the career of the future!**