

Asia-Pacific Library and Information Conference 2018

Title of Paper: A Daring Challenge – how to reinvent a library service

Abstract

In most hospital and rehabilitation settings – medical/hospital libraries are solely for hospital staff providing specialist academic resources intended for staff rather than the patients and their families. However there are a number of libraries in hospitals and rehabilitation centres internationally which have a long history, of supporting patients during their rehabilitation. An example of such a library is the Allan Bean Centre (ABC), in Christchurch, which provides a client centred, inclusive and visionary approach towards information provision for people with a spinal cord impairment (SCI). The ABC library's main objective is to foster the wellbeing and recovery of patients through offering a range of resources and services; for example, therapy, education and training.

Six years after the Christchurch earthquakes of 2011 the ABC Library was demolished. The loss of the library has had a significant impact on the patients, families, whanau and people with disabilities in the Christchurch community.

The challenge for any library that loses its building is how to carry on and continue to provide an essential service. Because the ABC library is not for profit — there were no funds to rebuild. Whilst waiting for a solution the ABC Library reinvented itself by setting up a number of initiatives. There were other challenges to face which necessitated creative thinking and daring. Three years on, the library is still in a state of flux, although there is the possibility of a new space becoming available in the future.

In the interim the ABC library must continue to provide resources, training and information to patients, their families and caregivers. This paper will report on the initiatives employed and how collaboration with a number of agencies was imperative, e.g the development of a new initiative with Christchurch City Libraries.

Introduction

The New Zealand Spinal Trust (NZST) is a charitable organisation which was founded in 1994 by the late Professor Alan Clarke to address the unmet needs of rehabilitation, information, research, advocacy and support for people with SCI (and other conditions) throughout New Zealand.

The NZST provides three key services: the Kaleidoscope Vocational Rehabilitation Service; Connecting People Peer Support Service and the ABC Library Service.

As part of the philosophy of the NZST, the ABC library believes that the rehabilitation process is essentially educational not medical, and follows the Independent Living (IL) model of rehabilitation. This model encourages the patients to contribute and direct the process of recovery with a goal to re-entering and maximizing their potential within the general community. This is a different and unique approach in

New Zealand allowing patients' needs to be the driving force behind the rehabilitation process. The recovering person needs access to a range of resources whether it is information about their injury/illness, pain management, retraining, learning new skills and/or returning to work or gaining new employment.

We provide a wide range of resources and services with a collection of over 1200 books, journals, magazines, and a range of digital media. Patient education is a key component of the library service and a range of publications have been produced.

Prior to the Christchurch earthquake of 2011, 8000 users/clients visited the library per year, and 700 people had access to free computer skills training.

Challenges post 2011 earthquake

The atmosphere in the ABC library, created in three equal parts being the building, the services and the staff within it, was very powerful, and important to the work carried out. The caring atmosphere has been referred to time and time again by patients, their families and numerous guests who visited the library and was a significant factor and, integral to making the NZST who we are.

The challenge for any library or organisation that loses its building is how to continue. Four years after the February earthquake, in July 2014, the CEO of the NZST received a phone call advising him and all the staff that we had 15 minutes to vacate the building. We never returned and spent the next five months working from home via the Trust's remote server. During this period there was only a basic library service available. This was disheartening because we were receiving comments from patients, families and staff about how much they missed the library. One client

mentioned how the library was a social hub and a lifeline to her. Patients, families/whanau and staff (physiotherapists, doctors, occupational therapists and nurses) all mourned the loss of the library.

Out of all of the NZST services it was obvious that the library would be the most affected by the earthquakes. There have been many challenges during my time with the NZST but I consider the loss of my library to be the most challenging of all.

Lessons Learned

There are many lessons to learn from the Canterbury earthquake recovery that could be applied to the loss of the ABC Library service.

While we have lost a very special place where people could relax, study, read, communicate, receive training and contemplate. It was important to look forward and think of solutions and opportunities. For example:

- How could we recreate elements of the ABC Library, like Gap Filler did for the arts community? Gap Filler is an initiative where artists and arts groups used events and interventions to reconnect and involve Christchurch people with the recreation of the city's CBD.
- What new initiatives could be explored for the benefit of patients, whanau and staff?
- Could this actually be an opportunity to increase the visibility and reach of the great services we provide?

Burwood Hospital and its patients, families/whanau and staff were without a library from July to early December 2014. Numerous conversations were had with senior CDHB managers to look for solutions. This proved difficult because due to the new hospital building not opening until August 2016 any available space was allocated to other departments with patient areas being a priority. I spent some considerable time scouting possible spaces only to find myself competing with CDHB staff – it was very stressful. One idea that floated around in my head was to have a ‘pop-up’ library until a long term space could be found. Within Canterbury there are plenty of examples of ‘pop-up’ libraries: for instance New Brighton Public Library set up a ‘pop-up’ library in the New Brighton shopping mall while the library was undergoing earthquake repairs. It was during this time that I had a number of meetings with senior managers at Christchurch City Libraries who had experienced numerous earthquake related problems but managed to keep their libraries running. Their knowledge and support was invaluable and reassuring during what was a very difficult situation. However, the pressure was on to find a space – during a conversation with my CEO, he suggested that I could set up a mini library in the lounge of the spinal unit.

‘Pop-up Library’

The Burwood Spinal unit was built in the late 1970’s and the décor has not changed very much since that time. In particular the lounge has a very 1960’s feel, is outdated and drab so I did have reservations about using this space. However reluctant I felt it was necessary to have a library service up and running so along with my colleagues we brain stormed and came up with a plan for action. Prior to the ABC Library demolition in August 2015, I had stored in a container on site the library’s collections, bookshelves, desks and furniture. Due to the restricted space, two large bookshelves

were set up in the lounge and stocked with a selection of resources on spinal cord injury, brain injury, journals, magazines, DVD's, and music cds. In addition three laptops were set up on adjustable tables for people in wheelchairs to access. Internet access was made available through the CDHB's public wifi. This meant we were able to provide computer classes for patients, families/whanau. During this period (December 2014 – August 2016) the user statistics dropped considerably – prior to 2011, the usage of the ABC library was over 8,000 visits per annum. While the drop in usage was not surprising given the circumstances it was demoralizing. However, the feedback we received about having a mini library in the lounge did outweigh those concerns. Patients and especially their families appreciated having the library close at hand. We noticed that relatives of patients felt comfortable in the space and would often stop and share confidences with the staff member on duty. Having a pop-up library in the spinal unit was only ever meant to be a temporary solution. Due to ongoing earthquake repairs, the spinal unit would be relocating to another ward while repairs and refurbishments are undertaken. This meant that the pop-up library would need to find a new home, so the search for another space began.

Cohabitation with a hospital library

With the opening of the new Burwood hospital complex and the transfer of Older Persons Health from the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) to Burwood, this meant that the PMH Staff Library would also need a home. It was at this stage that discussions began on the cohabitation of the ABC and PMH libraries. Both libraries are very different and distinct from each other. We each have a separate clientele, philosophy and focus and there were concerns about whether it was practical and

feasible to merge the two. During this phase the CDHB proposed that a new mini-health precinct incorporating the NZST, ABC Library, Burwood Academy of Independent Living (BAIL), the PMH Library, University of Otago researchers and students would be housed in the old admin block. A design brief was proposed and regular meetings took place for discussion. Unfortunately, following the Kaikoura earthquake of 2016 the old admin block suffered additional and unexpected levels of cracking. As a result the cost to undertake the proposed layout had significantly gone beyond the cost of a new build. So we were back to square one.

In the interim, along with the NZST, BAIL, PMH library and the university of Otago researchers we moved into temporary portacombs in August 2016.

Current situation

The ABC Library is still located in a small room in a temporary portacom. This too is an ongoing challenge to recreate a library service in a small space. More importantly, patients from the spinal unit face a number of barriers to physically access the library. Firstly patients have to negotiate a large sliding door which leads outside to the portacom. They then have to wheel up a steep ramp into the portacom which is not a pleasant prospect in the winter. Due to the small space the library has only two laptops available for internet access and computer training. The capacity to provide computer training for clients is significantly reduced as a result. Books, journals, magazines collections are condensed while the rest of the library's collections are held separately in a container some distance away from the portacom.

Despite the restrictions the library continues to survive while we wait for confirmation of our new location. We continue to provide computer training to people with brain

injury and mental health conditions with experienced and compassionate tutors in a safe and caring environment.

'Words to Wards' Project

So how did the ABC library take stock post-earthquake? It was imperative that we dared to reinvent ourselves in order to continue to provide a holistic library service for our clients. A number of initiatives were employed and collaboration with a number of agencies was essential. One exciting initiative is the collaboration with Christchurch City Libraries for the development of an e-resources project to hospital patients – the 'Words to Wards' project. The aim of the project is to promote e-resources e.g e-books, audio books, Press Reader and e-magazines to hospital patients. A team of ABC library volunteers will give one-to-one assistance to patients which may involve the following:

- adding library apps to their tablet or mobile device
- the downloading of items (e.g. books, magazines, newspapers, audiobooks) to their tablet or mobile device

A pilot programme will commence in May.

Other initiatives

1. Provision of tablets and iPads for patients to access social media and receive computer training.
2. Last year in collaboration with the Connecting People Family & Peer Support team we ran a number of mobile library sessions in the spinal unit with a selection of resources.

3. We recently upgraded Koha the library management system – with a new look OPAC to be launched in June.
4. A new marketing and community coordinator has joined the NZST in order to raise our profile and awareness about our services.
5. Introducing free NZST backpacks to new spinal patients – to be launched in June.

Conclusion

Like the rest of Christchurch, the ABC library concept will never be the same as it was. However, this is an opportunity to build and design an even better ABC library and build on the culture of the ABC Library as a unique centre where specialist rehabilitation information is provided to reflect the needs of the membership of the NZST, patients, their families, CDHB staff, researchers and students, the Burwood Spinal Unit as well as the Brain Injury Rehab Service and other departments. We will recreate is a quiet and peaceful place where patients can escape the confines of the hospital setting in a safe and supported environment, where they can explore information about their rehabilitation through the support of a specialist librarian, learn computing skills, keep in touch with the outside world through the provision of free internet and Wi-Fi, or just to sit and relax in a welcoming environment.

The ABC and PMH libraries are poised to enjoy a level of integration and closeness that could only be dreamed of 15 years ago. There is a great deal of willingness to collaborate and co-operate by all the stakeholders, including Christchurch City Libraries and to use this willingness in a constructive way. We are looking forward to confirmation over the next few months of where and what our new library may look like.

