PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

My knowledge journey as a health information management student at the Catholic Negotiating Alliance

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Introduction
Throughout the Health Information Management course at La Trobe University, students undertake numerous assignments that require a literature review to produce evidence-based findings. Reviewing the relevant literature broadens the students’ knowledge of issues and developments within the healthcare environment. This skill was an essential tool in my Professional Practice placement, as I needed to undertake a literature review to inform the proposed project on three categories of cognitive impairment. These categories were confusion, delirium and dementia, and the project was to investigate the implications of each category, individually and combined, that would affect the care provided to patients at a healthcare facility.

My placement was within the Catholic Negotiating Alliance (CNA), which aims to improve the quality and efficiency of Australian Catholic ‘not-for-profit’ private hospitals. Private Hospitals have only limited ability to share information between themselves due to market and competition law constraints. CNA is authorised by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), to share data among its members. The data shared are relevant to achieving improvements in benchmarking activity. They are also pertinent to improvements in cost and revenue data in order to achieve best practice, performance and efficiency. The rich data collected by CNA also enabled me to make key connections between the literature reviews I conducted. This placement provided an exciting opportunity for me to utilise a wide range of skills developed over my time as a Master of Health Information Management student.

The process
The initial brief of this project was wide-ranging, and the final direction would be guided by the findings of numerous article reviews that I would undertake. The main objective was to determine what, if any, connection there was between confusion, delirium and dementia, how they are identified and reported, and how those findings compared with the CNA data. The process of the literature review was quite daunting as there was a tremendous amount of information on these topics. The refinement process was undertaken with the guidance of my agency supervisor. The literature produced some key information. For example, in a prospective study of general medical, general surgical and orthopaedic ward patients aged > 70 years, it was found that 9.7% had delirium on admission and a further 7.6% developed delirium during their stay (Travers et al. 2013). Another consistent fact was the average length of stay (ALOS) was longer for those patients with delirium (Travers et al. 2013). Individuals with dementia who experience delirium are twice as likely to die within one year of admission (Steis & Fick 2012). These simple findings combined with the projected three-fold increase in cases of dementia within Australia between 2011 and 2050 highlighted to me the value of this project (AIHW 2012).

The connections made between published data, the discussion in the literature and the data extracted from the CNA database truly bridged the practical application of my theoretical learning at La Trobe University. I found myself repeatedly using the knowledge gained from the subjects of Health Data Analysis, Health Classification and Clinical Coding and Principles of Health Informatics. This also highlighted to me the value and significance of the Health Information Management Professional Practice Placement Program for students at La Trobe University, as I was able to apply the skills I had been developing during my course in a real world environment.

With the expertise and experience of my placement supervisor, I was able to refine the data extracted into a narrative that conveyed key findings in line with my literature review. These findings have been presented to senior department heads and the review has opened discussion for further investigation. This project has been an evolving one and with each presentation the ensuing discussion defined the future direction of this work.

Lessons learnt
As the initial brief was wide-ranging it was at first difficult for me to formulate the main direction of the project. There are so many possibilities when you start looking at a topic and, if you are a novice at interpreting data, it is important to ask for another set of eyes to review the information you are collating. I was continually impressed with the team at CNA and how they were able to review the information I would present incrementally, and how they gave me alternative interpretations for my consideration. This showed me the value in
having regular review meetings with my supervisor not only to ensure that I was heading in the right direction, but also to offer other possible directions for my consideration.

The project provided an invaluable opportunity for me to investigate the areas which I could pursue after completing my Master of Health Information Management qualification. I found that I was constantly looking at ways to extract data that would be in line with the narrative of the project as it was developing. It also highlighted the need to become better at my interpretation of the data as I found myself looking for answers in some of my graphs when in fact there was nothing in them. This lesson for me was, not all data or graphs will result in some sort of finding no matter how you try to present it, whether it be a line, bar or pie graph.

Being able to understand the mindset of your audience has been an interesting skill for me to develop. Although we would give numerous presentations at La Trobe University to our fellow students and lecturers, presenting the same information to a different audience was something new to me. The perspective of a clinical staff member differs from that of a CC or a finance officer when presented with the same information. With regard to the clinical staff members, I would have to ensure that the data represented the areas of interest to them, such as the percentage of episodes and variances in ALOS. For the CC, the DRGs and method of capturing the data were of particular interest. Another key point that I learnt was to keep all the information with me at each presentation as I did not know what questions I might be asked at any presentation. I found that when I presented my finding to a group that I believed would have no need for clinical details, such as the definitions of or key difference between confusion, delirium and dementia, they asked me that precise question! Although I was able to respond, it would have been better to include the information in the presentation.

**Summary**

My Health Information Management Professional Practice Placement Program at CNA enabled me to experience a real life project from research through to data analysis and presentation. It gave me a chance to better understand the unique skills that HIMs can bring to a healthcare service as we have a wide range of knowledge from data analysis, clinical coding and informatics.

In Professional Practice Placements there is great potential for enhancing existing skills; for me, that was the technical side of understanding data structures and methods of data extraction. Furthermore, this placement highlighted areas that may need ongoing development, namely data interpretation and utilising that data to define the narrative of the presentation in conjunction with the literature review.

From the beginning, this project has grown and developed, giving me a platform from which I could refine and develop my skills as a HIM. It has given me the ability to work within a range of different areas in a health service environment and provided a new perspective on possible areas of further research and development.

**Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my placement supervisor and the team at CNA for their support and the tremendous opportunity to be involved in such an interesting project. I experienced a great transformation in my ability to extract data and then interpret the findings into a fluent presentation. This project also gave me an insight into a possible career path as I was captivated with the process of working with numerous databases and refining the data to determine its narrative. I encourage all agencies to participate in the Professional Practice program, not only to offer students the opportunity of experiencing a real world environment, but to exchange fresh ideas with inquisitive minds.

**References**

