

Health librarians in research teams: Poles apart or a natural fit?

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Two study questions:

1. What are the skills & competencies needed by Research Assistants in health?
2. How do these compare with the skills & competencies of health librarians?

Research Tasks

- Analysed RA job advertisements – essential criteria only
- Studied competencies for Australian health librarians
- Compared competencies for each

Key finding:

In the Australian academic & health sectors there is **significant overlap** in competencies of RAs and health librarians.

So What?

Is this a future direction for health librarians?

→ Implications for research,
library service, and librarians.

Coming up:

1. Analysis of health RA job advertisements
2. Details of comparison with health librarian competencies
3. Implications - if health librarians have an active role in providing research assistance...
4. Reflections

Results - 39 RA job advertisements in health

Advertised nationally January – July 2014

Tertiary degree specified for all but one job:

- Health, social or behavioural sciences 40%
- 'Relevant' discipline 35%

17 competencies in total:

- 7 research-related
- 10 generic skills or personal qualities

Skills sought most frequently in RA jobs (60% or more):

- Oral & written communication
- Self-direction
- Time management
- Computer literacy
- Research experience

Literature searching, review, appraisal or synthesis = specified in 50% of jobs.

Skills sought less frequently (30% or less):

- Data and statistical analysis
- Data collection
- Problem-solving
- EndNote, teaching, project management

Competencies for Health Librarians

Health care environment

Services to users

Manage info resources

Leadership and strategy

Info technology & systems

Teaching and education

Research

Lifelong learning

Generic librarian skills – ALIA:

communication

critical & creative thinking

ethics

human resources

ICT

partnership building

problem solving

project management

supervision

teamwork

RA and health librarian skills match in many areas

- Very high correlation in generic skills
- Also literature searching and EndNote
- Good correlation for knowledge of research publications and grants
- Possible correlation for
 - Research experience
 - Data collection
 - Data analysis

Health librarians' research competency may include these

If health librarians

take an active role in providing research assistance:

- embed roles as expert searcher and teacher of searching methods
- enhance information management in research
- gain broader research experience

Research leaders gain access to

- continuing staff
- with RA expertise

Personal experience as an RA

Tasks:

Acquire subject knowledge

Lit search & synthesis

Focus group

Online survey

Phone interviews

Analyse data

Permission to re-use images

Discussion paper

Proof-reading, publications

Admin for research team:

Draft ethics application

Meetings & follow-up

Report to funder

New?

Yes

No/Yes

Yes

No

No

Yes

No/Yes

No/Yes

No

Yes

No

No

Limitations

- Advertisements - imperfect source
- Vague wording in job descriptions
- High-level wording in librarian competencies
- Non-expert exploration

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