

Health Sciences

Leonie

(1st Class Honours) 2007

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From Nursing ... to Health Information Management

In a previous life (well, back in the 1990s) I was a Registered Nurse, having obtained my Diploma of Applied Science (Nursing) through La Trobe University's Lincoln School of Health Sciences. Although I worked for a few years as a nurse (mainly at The Alfred Hospital), and

enjoyed most of that phase of my life, I realised it was not what I saw myself doing for the next thirty years! Without knowing what my new career would be, but still wanting to remain within the health care field, I began work as an Office Manager within a busy cardiology practice at Cabrini Medical Centre. This was a wonderful job but when I read an article within *The Age's* employment section describing Health Information Management and specifically, Clinical Coding, I knew I had found the challenge I needed and a new profession to aim for.

Returning to University at the age of 34 was a daunting prospect but the academic and administrative staff within the Faculty of Health Sciences both encouraged and guided me and before I knew it I was a full-time student. The next three and a half years of study were a challenging and rewarding time and really went by quickly. The lecturers were always helpful and approachable and the course content was varied and stimulating. With my clinical background I particularly enjoyed the medically focused units (such as anatomy, physiology, medical terminology and pharmacology) and, of course, being taught the complex skill of clinical coding medical records. We were also mentally challenged with medico-legal, psychology and staff management units. Those with a passion for all things computerised (not me) were directed down the health-IT stream later in the course.

The professional placements I was fortunate enough to experience were also a highlight. I was lucky enough to spend time at Wangaratta Hospital, St. Vincent's, and St. George's Hospital, and a wonderful eleven weeks with the staff of the National Coroners Information System. I then chose to lengthen my studies by undertaking the further six months required to complete the Honours Program. This was an extremely rewarding experience and was done in conjunction with the National Coroners Information System staff and resources.

Since December 2007 I have been working at The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Health Information Services Department as a Health Information Manager/Clinical Coder. As a new graduate I receive added support in my work and feel part of a friendly and hard working team. The medical records I code cover the whole range of diseases and traumas treated by this large, acute care teaching hospital, and I never know what medical conditions will greet me each time I open a medical record. Beginning in May, I have also been learning the intricacies involved in the sending of computerised admission data to the state government's Department of Human Services. This is an enormous challenge but a skill that will hold me in good stead for the rest of my career.

