

Medical treasures go online thanks to alumni group, and support



The Otago alumni group behind a project to put an extensive “treasure trove” of medical artefacts online says the project is going well – but they would like to hear from alumni who can help continue this and other activities.

In May this year the Otago Medical School Alumnus Association (OMSAA) launched an online catalogue of 256 items from its collection of several thousand medical instruments, records, artefacts and memorabilia. By October 2016 more than 1,180 artefacts were online.

View the collection here

Former association secretary treasurer Dr Bill Gillespie says a special item of interest was a carbolic acid steam sprayer used by British surgeon and antiseptic surgery pioneer Lord Lister.

Alongside such historically significant rarities, the collection also includes many items which show how medical concepts have been communicated over the years. One item, *Good-bye Tonsils*, a 1976 book from the children’s Little Golden Book series, was described by publishers as a “jolly little book on how to have fun with or without tonsils”.



An eclectic collection . . . The children's book Good-bye Tonsils and an array of items from the collection.

OMSAA Chairman Dr John Adams said getting the “treasure trove” of artefacts that tell important stories of our history and the development of medicine into the public domain has long been a priority for the association.

“New items are given to us regularly, many with significant local meaning and provenance – the hope for the future is that we will be in a position to deal with these as they arrive.

The items shown online are currently housed in the Otago Medical School, are on display throughout the Dunedin Public Hospital or are in storage.

“The idea that we might be able to share the collection with alumni and the public has been an exciting thought that many people have been working towards for some time.”

Dr Adams says Display Artist and Cataloguer Judith Clarke has “worked tirelessly on photographing and annotating every item in the collection” and the “knowledge and enthusiasm” of Honorary Curator of Artefacts Dr Paul Trotman has also pushed the project along in recent years.



OMSAA Honorary Curator Dr Paul Trotman places a carbolic acid sprayer used by Lord Lister in a Dunedin Hospital display case.

The project was made possible by funding from members of the Medical School Class of 1964 reunion, held in Dunedin in April 2015, and the Alumni of the University of Otago in America, Inc.

Dr Adams says donor support is vital for the project’s continuation, and the group’s survival.

“Our reality is that we have meagre financial resources as an Association. In the past a membership fee has been charged, but that is not the case now, and so any future project will rely on further donations. An even more important issue, in terms of alumni support, is getting interested people involved in the executive and the affairs of the Association.

“We would very much like any interested members to get in touch. Lack of involvement and participation is the biggest threat to the future of the Association.”

It is hoped the remainder of items will be catalogued and listed online in the next 12 months.

[OMSAA thanks retiring members Bill Gillespie and Graham Mortimer - read more here](#)

Contact us

If you are interested in learning more or getting involved, please contact the Medical Alumnus Association:

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