

Anaesthesia Project

Ernest and Marion Davis Library

When the curators of the Ernest and Marion Davis Library (EMDL) received a grant from the Australia and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists towards cataloguing and researching the anaesthesia objects in our collection, we thought we were dealing with a small number of boxes in our museum storage area. However, through the process of researching the origins of what is held on site at the EMDL – a standalone museum and library on the grounds of Auckland Hospital – we have found ourselves responsible for a much larger collection. The Department of Anaesthesia and Perioperative Medicine at Auckland Hospital amassed a large collection over many decades which has now come under the care of the EMDL. The anaesthesia department has kept everything, which is wonderful in terms of breadth and completeness, but raises difficulties in terms of long-term storage and care. The EMDL is now faced with the dilemma of what to keep and what to dispose of, maintaining that balance between preservation, documenting changing technology, and hoarding.

Certain objects resonate, such as the ‘difficult intubation trolley’ (D.I.T.) for patients with tricky airway issues, still loaded with an array of scopes, tubing and hoses – left as it was when it was last wheeled out of an operating theatre in the early 2000s. We are also intrigued by the home-made, rudimentary aspects of some of the objects – Joe Petoe’s portable anaesthesia

machine dating from the 1970s, that he made for his medical practice by packing a Bird Mark II ventilator into a suitcase, with a hole drilled into the side for attaching a gas cylinder (image at left below). A much older, simpler example is a Brylcreem bottle adapted to administer ether by a double nozzle attachment screwed on to the top. Perhaps the most entertaining object speaks also of the role of the hospital anaesthesia department in teaching and extending the profession: a moveable lectern in current use in the seminar room of the department made from an old Boyle anaesthetic machine with many of the cylinders still attached (image at right below).

We are cataloguing as we go, and the collection records are immediately loaded onto [eHive](#), where they are accessible to the public.

Our initial project goals are to organise, document and store the collections held in both locations. As we progress, we will shift our focus to researching objects and stories that make those collections come to life: the New Zealand connections and the Auckland Hospital stories. These will be used to enhance our physical displays in the EMDL and in the anaesthesia department, as well as online tools such as the Our Health Journeys website (<https://www.ourhealthmuseum.org.nz/>), and our own Instagram [@emdavislib](#).

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Curators

