



Case Study: Damion Cotterell

What is it like to work for
Health Services Laboratories?



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Why did you join HSL?

I travelled to the U.K. on a holiday working Visa in 2006 from New Zealand and undertook a role in Infection Sciences as a locum MLA awaiting HCPC registration. In the 6 months leading up to my HCPC registration a Biomedical Scientist position became available with sponsorship to remain in the U.K. This role presented me with opportunities to learn skills in Microbiology that I could not have learned back in New Zealand.



Damion in the Mycology department

Describe your department and what is your role in the department?

I am currently working in Infection Sciences in manual microbiology as a biomedical scientist. My role includes day to day running of the service in particular the antimicrobial susceptibility testing benches. I am involved in quality assurance within the department. I also fulfil a role in maintain the high level isolation unit pathology laboratory (HLIUPL), which handles category 4 infections and most recently supported the Ebola breakout.

What's the most challenging case you have come across?

In 2010 whilst working on the fluids bench we encountered a fluid taken from a patient with a query of cerebral cancer as the primary clinical indication. After 5 days incubation we cultured *Nocardia* sp, a slow growing organism closely related to Actinomycetes, known to cause cerebral infection. The diagnosis for this patient was not of cancer but an infection and this dramatically impacted upon the treatment and outcome, in a positive way, as the patient fully recovered. This highlighted the importance of microbiology's contribution to patient care.

How did HSL assist you in getting you where you are today?

As part of my development I am undertaking an MSc in Medial Microbiology in preparation for career progression to a senior scientist role. This was made possible through support from HSL in both funding and allowing the time during working hours to commit to this degree. I hope to complete my masters in 2019, and progress within HSL into a role as senior scientist.

Are you working on any kind of project/validations/method development?

I am currently undertaking a project validating the antifungal susceptibility testing of filamentous fungi to antifungal agents. For years this testing has been transferred to the reference facility in the UK. The turn around time to results is slow and by verifying this test in-house we can transfer the service into the laboratory and improve the turnaround time which will have a positive clinical impact when managing patients.

Is your future career with HSL?

Absolutely! HSL has offered me an excellent opportunity for developing new skills both in Infection Sciences and beyond and I am excited to see where my career path takes me whilst also repaying the the commitment that they have shown in me.

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