

eHealth: resources you can use

Yunkap Kwankam continues his 'good guide'



Happy New Year!

At one point during a keynote address that I gave at the 36th World Hospital Congress in Rio de Janeiro in November 2009, I paused for 10 seconds – the time it takes Usain Bolt to run 100 metres and be into his victory lap. In those 10 seconds three children died worldwide. In another 50 seconds beyond the pause, one female life would be lost in childbirth. In 2010, it does not look like things will change much. But these horrifying statistics should not overly discourage us. Instead, they should strengthen our resolve to bring ICT to better serve the health needs of people. Quite often, though, health professionals who want to avail themselves of eHealth technology are not aware of what resources they can tap into. This article highlights a few – the tip of the iceberg.

HINARI

Launched in January 2002, HINARI – the WHO Access to Research Initiative – provides free or low-cost online access to major journals in biomedical and related social sciences to not-for-profit institutions in identified developing countries. Participation has grown exponentially, from the original six publishers to more than 150 today, who offer more than 6200 journals. Each beneficiary country is either in Band 1 (free access) or Band 2 (low-cost access). Worldwide, 4130 institutions in 108 countries are taking advantage of these resources as registered users. In Africa there are seven countries in Band 2: Angola, Algeria, Cape Verde, Morocco, Namibia, Swaziland, and Tunisia; and eight countries not included: Comoros, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Libya, Mauritius, Seychelles, and South Africa. All other African countries, 38 in number, are in Band 1 and get HINARI free.

To build capacity for use of HINARI resources, the program offers five main training modules, covering areas from basic Internet concepts (eResources and Internet searching), through a guided tour of the HINARI Web-interface, to how to use the EndNote web reference management software. The package also includes modules on exploring the full set of resources available through publisher partners, and use of PubMed Website

Interface; Using Limits; MeSH; Index, History, Access FullText Articles; MyNCBI.

Encouraged by the success of HINARI, two sister initiatives have been developed – for agriculture, and the environment. Other programmes that offer access to the indexed literature are described at the HINARI website www.who.int/hinari.

So what if you don't speak English?

The limited number of eHealth resources in languages other than English poses a challenge for those who don't speak the language. We highlight two programmes that address other language communities. The Réseau en Afrique Francophone pour la Télémedecine (RAFT – <http://raft.hcuge.ch/>), launched in 2000 by the Geneva University Hospital and the Health On the Net Foundation (www.hon.ch/), is a network for eHealth in Africa. RAFT is engaged in two main types of activities: providing free access to continuing education courses, webcast on a weekly basis using the Dudal low-bandwidth environment; and telemedicine consultations using the iPath platform (<http://ipath.ch>). Countries currently taking advantage of the programme include Mali (the pioneering country), Cameroon, Mauritania, and Morocco; and more recently, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal, and Tunisia. Some course material is available in English.

The ePORTUGUÊSe (www.who.int/eportuguese) is a WHO programme, created as a platform to support the development of human resources for health in Portuguese-speaking countries, by facilitating collaboration among institutions, delivering health information, and promoting capacity building.

These are only a microcosm of the wealth of significant eHealth resources available on the Internet. And yes, there is a lot of junk, and outright bad information, on the Internet as well. That's why you should look for HON certification on the sites you visit. These are trusted sites who subscribe to the HON code of conduct. I would strongly encourage you to take advantage of these online resources. They can provide information to help reduce those shocking health statistics about Africa that assail our sense of wellbeing on a daily basis.

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