

## Medical/health databases

John Eyers guides us through the best ones to use



Most health professionals in Africa are aware of Pubmed, the most important, free, general biomedical literature database produced by the US National Library of Medicine. There are, however, many other bibliographic databases in the health field which cover particular specialties of medicine and allied interdisciplinary subjects, many of which are free to access but which are often ignored. In this issue, I shall list the most important free databases of use to African health professionals and describe their features and why they are useful; and in the next issue I will describe the basic principles of searching these databases. Knowing how to search these databases effectively is important if key papers are not to be missed.

**Pubmed/Medline** ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/)) Indexes 5200 journals published worldwide dating back to 1948, covering all clinical specialties and non-clinical aspects of health, such as health economics, health policy, etc. It now contains about 19 million articles of which about 90% are in English or include an English abstract, with a bias towards journals published in the West. Such comprehensive coverage of the modern biomedical literature dictates that it cannot be ignored in any literature search especially as the most important prestigious journals are included. Excellent for clinical medicine; less so for interdisciplinary aspects of health-care when other databases will need to be searched. Includes a link to free full text where available.

**Popline** (<http://db.jhuccp.org/ics-wpd/popweb/>) Produced by Johns Hopkins University this is the most important database covering reproductive and sexual health, demography, and maternal and child health, with much material relating to the developing world. It includes (from 1970 onwards) journals, books, reports, and unpublished material with links to free full text where available. Where not available online, Popline will provide full text documents to developing countries ([popline@jhuccp.org](mailto:popline@jhuccp.org)). See also the **WHO Reproductive Health Library** (through **Hinari** ([www.who.int/hinari/en/](http://www.who.int/hinari/en/))), which provides reviews and summaries of the literature.

**Cochrane Library** ([www.thecochranelibrary.com](http://www.thecochranelibrary.com)) or through **Hinari** ([www.who.int/hinari/en/](http://www.who.int/hinari/en/)) A collection of databases that contains high-quality, independent evidence to inform healthcare decision-

---

As a member of HIFA2015 (<http://www.hifa2015.org/>), John Eyers believes one of the biggest challenges for improved health in less-developed countries is ensuring that equal access to appropriate and evidence-based health information is made available to all.

making. Cochrane's systematic reviews represent the highest level of evidence on which to base clinical treatment decisions. Includes databases of systematic reviews, economic evaluations, clinical trials, and methods. Much effort has gone into including reviews of direct relevance to the developing world, particularly in infectious diseases and reproductive health. The most important resource for evidence-based medicine. See also **Trip Database** ([www.tripdatabase.com](http://www.tripdatabase.com)), which is a clinical search engine designed to allow health professionals to identify clinical evidence for clinical practice rapidly. It includes systematic reviews, clinical guidelines, e-textbooks, and evidence-based synopses.

**Clinical Evidence** (<http://clinicalevidence.bmj.com>) and through **Hinari** ([www.who.int/hinari/en/](http://www.who.int/hinari/en/)) produced by the *British Medical Journal* provides systematic reviews and commissioned papers and other resources for evidence-based clinical decisions.

**African Index Medicus** (<http://indexmedicus.afri.who.int/>)

Very few African medical journals are included in bibliographic databases produced in the West, and this database produced by the WHO's AFRO Regional Office is a response to the need to make the African medical literature available to a wider audience. Articles from Africa are much more likely to be appropriate and relevant to clinical and health practice in the region than articles written from a developed country perspective in the West. WHO's **Global Health Library** ([www.globalhealthlibrary.net](http://www.globalhealthlibrary.net)) includes all the indexes from the WHO Regions, as well as other databases such as Pubmed/Medline, allowing cross-searching by subject.

**The Source** ([www.asksource.info/](http://www.asksource.info/))

Contains information for health workers in developing countries – journal articles, newsletters, manuals, and reports (with links to full text where available) as well as lists of organisations involved in health and development. Key subject areas include early childhood development, disability, and HIV/AIDS.

**Eldis** ([www.eldis.org](http://www.eldis.org))

Useful for non-clinical information on health and development: health policy, health economics, health systems, HIV/AIDS, and poverty as well as country data and current development vacancies. Much of the material is in full text in the form of manuals, reports, and other difficult-to-find documents not usually available in conventional medical databases.

**Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.co.uk>)

A good back-up to the standard databases above and excellent in determining what is available free full text online – easy searching for subjects and authors.