

Information resources in reproductive health



John Eyers maps the key information providers on the web

One of the key Millenium Development Goals¹ is to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters and to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Much useful information on reproductive health in the developing world is not simply found in medical journals identified in bibliographic databases, but may be found in reports, policy documents, and other 'grey' publications not often indexed in databases such as PubMed. This is because a multidisciplinary approach is often selected in providing effective access to health for women, and so draws on the work of, not only clinicians and healthcare workers, but also anthropologists, economists, psychologists, policy makers, and others in the social sciences. Since the journal article is not necessarily the main medium of communication in the social sciences, as in science and medicine, a more imaginative and wide-ranging search is needed to identify this 'fugitive' literature, so that book chapters, government and agency reports, conference papers, theses, and so on are retrieved.

The following is a small selection of the resources available that include databases, web sites, and data sets.

Databases

Popline (<http://www.popline.org>) – Produced by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, this is the most important database on reproductive health, with a strong emphasis on the developing world, encompassing maternal and child health, fertility and family planning, HIV/AIDS and STIs, adolescent reproductive health, population and migration, as well as policy and gender issues. It also recognises the importance of including books, reports, newsletters and unpublished documents as well as the more conventional journal articles. Not the easiest database to search but some 'ready-made' searches are available including adolescent pregnancy, antiretroviral therapy, behaviour change, family planning methods, HIV/AIDS prevention, and male circumcision.

Many full-text documents are available free online, but a document delivery service is available free to

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. John would be delighted to receive comments and suggestions for future articles. Email him on: johneyers@hotmail.com.

most countries in Africa (Email popline@jhuccp.org). Hinari (<http://www.who.int/hinari/en>) may give free full text access to some journals cited in Popline.

Eldis (<http://www.eldis.org>) – Concerned with all aspects of development, it includes substantial resources on maternal and child health and in particular, those difficult-to-find 'grey' documents, many of which are unpublished. There are also country profiles and 26 000 free full-text publications.

WHO Reproductive Health Library (<http://apps.who.int/rhl/en>) or through **Hinari** – Extracts the best available evidence on sexual and reproductive health from the Cochrane Library, and presents it in a practical way for clinicians and others to improve outcomes. Included are experts' commentaries and practical advice; there are also training videos. A free CD-ROM of the database is available from WHO (email RHL@who.int).

Demographic and Health Surveys Measure DHS (<http://www.measuredhs.com>) – A database of datasets, which includes important baseline indicators of reproductive health from many African countries, often over a number of years. Some of the indicators inform progress made, or not, in the reproductive health aspects of the MDGs. A useful feature is the Statcompiler which enables a user to customise individual tables from hundreds of surveys and indicators. Each country survey is available in full-text.

General web sites

Reproductive Health Gateway (<http://www.k4health.org/resources/rhgateway>) – Part of the Johns Hopkins's Knowledge for Health Program, it provides easy access to over 130 websites which have been evaluated for quality and reliable evidence; these include WHO, UN, World Bank as well as all the most important NGOs in the field. A single keyword search allows the user to search all the sites at the same time, saving much time.

WHO Global Health Library (<http://globalhealth-library.net/php/index.php>) – Useful for regional offices resources brought together under one site, with easy searching across different indexes and sources, with easy searching of African Index Medicus for articles on reproductive health published in African journals.

Reference

1. United Nations Development Programme. Millenium Development Goals (<http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>). Accessed 14th Nov 2010.