Improving access to healthcare information in resource poor settings

A position paper for WHO
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Why improve access?

• To facilitate development of knowledge based health systems
• In which healthcare decisions are informed by the best available research evidence
• Part of bridging the “know-do” gap
Reliable health information is potentially the single most cost-effective and achievable strategy for sustainable improvement in health care.
NB:

• Access to information is a small (though crucial) piece of the picture
• Developed countries are still struggling with many of the same issues
Now is the time

- Growing worldwide connectivity
- Other appropriate technologies
- Expansion of evidence based health care
- More and better materials
- Health information seen as key part of international development
- Active and growing interest from international community
Vision

Health information for all by 2015
What do we know about information needs of health professionals in developing countries?

• Very little empirical research
• Strong preference for paper
• Journals of little use
• Lack of physical access a major barrier
Barriers

- Lack of physical access
- Lack of awareness of what is available
- Lack of time and incentives to access information
- Lack of skills and peer support to interpret information
- Lack of demand
Two questions

• How do we ensure people have the right sort of information they need?
  – Reliable
  – Relevant
  – Actionable

• How do we ensure that research addresses the important questions?
The healthcare knowledge figure of eight

People making healthcare decisions (healthcare providers and patients)

People promoting local access to information

Producers of information and knowledge materials

People producing systematic reviews and overviews

New knowledge

Questions

Guidance

Gaps

Indexers and people who maintain registers

Journal editors and peer reviewers

Researchers and authors

Research prioritisers, including patients
Research into information needs

• Support SRs and new studies
• Strengthen local information cycles
• Evaluate existing initiatives
Improve access to existing materials

• Support national reference centres, district libraries and local resource centres
• Create a Global Library for Health
• Support access to essential materials in local languages
• Explore use of other technologies
Improve relevance and usability

- Facilitate local production
- Support local information cycles
- Support translation of essential materials
Improve reliability

• Build local capacity in systematic reviewing and research
• Facilitate open access to results of systematic reviews and new research
• Strengthen journals and indexes in the South
Improve connectivity

• Extend email and internet connectivity (priority to libraries, local resource centres, and producers of materials)
• Provide computer hardware, software, and IT support
• Provide training in computer and internet skills
• Involve private sector
Skills training and development

• Rationalise existing initiatives
• Investigate and experiment with different approaches
• Establish incentives (CME/re-accreditation)
• Encourage mentoring and peer support
Review

• Inclusive global review of health information development over the past 10 years
  – How has the overall picture changed
  – What has worked
  – What has not worked
  – Lessons learned
  – Priorities for the future
WHO’s Role

• Unique legitimising and convening power
• International leadership role
• Can support development of a broad strategic framework for partnership and cooperation among stakeholders
Establish an International collaborative group

• Made up of
  – Users
  – People running successful initiatives
  – Funders

• To formulate and implement a Special Initiative on Access to Healthcare Information
Vision
Health information for all by 2015

• Reliable, relevant, usable information, locally produced
• Based on freely available generic information (drug formularies, evidence syntheses) and source material (systematic reviews, new research studies), much of which is also locally produced
• Achieved through building capacity at every stage in the knowledge cycle