

Medical journals for free

Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan announced in his Millennium Report (DPI/2147/B) in August 2000, several initiatives of effective partnerships the United Nations can catalyse. Among these is the Health InterNetwork

The Health InterNetwork aims to bridge the 'digital divide' gap between the developed and developing countries, by enabling health care workers, researchers and policy makers in developing countries to gain access to state-of-the-art health information using modern technology, – including the Internet –, primarily by increasing the information available both to the public and to health workers. Thereby doctors and other health care workers can exchange information, access training and educational resources, and provide services across geographic and social boundaries.

The announcement had stated 'Working in partnership, the United Nations and the US-based WebMD Foundation are seeking to bring together industry donors and partners from the information and communication technology field, national and multilateral agencies, and local non-governmental organizations. The core partners – the United Nations and its specialized agencies, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the private sector, led by the WebMD Foundation – are in the process of starting a pilot phase with support from the United Nations Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.'

Working with the *British Medical Journal* and the Open Society Institute of the Soros foundation network, WHO approached six biggest medical journal publishers (Blackwell, Elsevier Science, the Harcourt Worldwide STM Group, Wolters Kluwer International Health & Science, Springer Verlag and John Wiley), with the aim of bringing them together with the countries concerned to seek a more affordable pricing structure for online access to their international biomedical journals.

Now, after nearly a year, in a Press Release (WHO/32) on 9 July 2001, the WHO and the six medical journal pub-

lishers announced an initiative which will enable close to 100 developing countries to gain access to vital scientific information that they otherwise could not afford.

'The arrangement agreed to by the six publishers would allow almost 1000 of the world's leading medical and scientific journals to become available through the Internet to medical schools and research institutions in developing countries for free or at deeply-reduced rates.'

The Director-General of WHO, Gro Harlem Brundtland, said at the time of the Press Release: 'As a direct consequence of this arrangement, many thousands of doctors, researchers and health policy-makers, among others, will be able to use the best-available scientific evidence to an unprecedented degree to help them improve the health of their populations. It is perhaps the biggest step ever taken towards reducing the health information gap between rich and poor countries.'

The press release went on to state: 'Until now, biomedical journal subscriptions, both electronic and print, have been priced uniformly for medical schools, research centres and similar institutions irrespective of geographical location. Annual subscription prices cost on average several hundred dollars per title. Many key titles cost more than \$1500 per year. This has made it all but impossible for the large majority of health and research institutions in the poorest countries to access critical scientific information.'

Scheduled to start in January 2002, the initiative is expected to last for at least 3 years while being monitored for progress. It will benefit bona fide academic and research institutions, which depend on timely access to biomedical journals. Between now and the end of this year, these institutions will be identified individually and the process put in place so that they can receive and use access authentication'.

Under the proposed rules, institutions, in countries where per capita GNP is less than \$ 1000 a year, would get the journals free. In countries where the per capita GNP is between \$ 1000

and \$ 3000, there would be a minimal charge. Access to the journals will be through an internet portal which the WHO is creating as part of Health InterNetwork

The *Washington Post* noted on 8 July 2001 that 'The initiative is the publishing world's counterpart to the drug industry's newfound commitment to make medicines for AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis more widely available to Third World countries. The democratization of medical information, however, is likely to be far easier and cheaper than the democratization of pharmaceutical therapy'. The website, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A33714-2001Jul8.html> provides a detailed comparison of the existing subscription rates for the world's most important medical journals and the benefits that this proactive reduction in 'digital divide' gap brings about. Hopefully these will act as paradigms of many more partnerships between the rich and the poor.

While acknowledging that the United Nations is playing a major and important role of a facilitator, one may note that there have been many other independent efforts by smaller NGOs in promoting on-line cheaper or free access to journals in developing nations. See, for example, the article 'Online databases' by Canor Tenopir in *Library Journal* (November 2000, p. 34) (website: www.libraryjournal.com)

The web-site <http://www.freemedicaljournals.com/> has noted on 1 August 2001 that: 'Within the next two years, the most important medical journals will be available online, free and in full-text. The access to free scientific knowledge will have a major impact on medical practice and attract Internet visitors to these journals. Journals that restrict access to their Web sites will lose popularity'.

The Free Medical Journals Site is dedicated to the promotion of free access to medical journals over the Internet. The site has listed several journals under different categories (each arranged in decreasing order of impact factor); many of these could be accessed and full texts could be read for free.

NEWS

Free journals

Journal of Clinical Investigation
Developmental Biology
British Medical Journal
Neurobiology of Disease
Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report
MMWR
International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology
Biochemical Journal
Emerging Infectious Diseases
Journal of Hepatology
Journal of Neurosurgery
American Journal of Clinical Pathology

Additional 690 free journals, sorted by specialty

Free one to six months after publication

New England Journal of Medicine – free after 6 months
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences – free after 1 month
Molecular Biology of the Cell – free after 2 months
Genetics – free after 3 months
Molecular and Cellular Biology
Journal of Cell Biology
Journal of Virology
Journal of Clinical Microbiology
Infection and Immunity
Journal of Bacteriology
Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy

Free one year after publication

Endocrine Reviews
Pharmacological Reviews
Physiological Reviews
Genes & Development
EMBO Journal
American Journal of Human Genetics
Development
Circulation
Blood
Clinical Microbiology Reviews
Circulation Research
Journal of Biological Chemistry
Journal of Immunology
Molecular Endocrinology
American Journal of Pathology
Genome Research
Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology
Molecular Biology and Evolution
Journal of Cell Science
Molecular Pharmacology
Hypertension
American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine
Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism
Endocrinology
Stroke

Free two years after publication

Journal of Experimental Medicine
Journal of Neuroscience
Brain

Journal of Infect. Diseases
Radiology
Journal of General Physiology

Free after one year

Pediatric Research
AJP – Regulatory, Integrative and Comparative Physiology

Free trial

Psychosomatic Medicine
European Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology
Experimental Biology and Medicine

Free

Clinical Diabetes
Indian Journal of Psychiatry
Pre Hospital Immediate Care
Revista Española de Enfermedades Digestivas
Clinical Diabetes
Revista Chilena de Enfermedades Respiratorias

The following journals are not free anymore

European Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery
Annals of Thoracic Surgery