

THE ETHICAL

Initiatives to Provide Free Journal Access to Less-Privileged Countries

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Providing free access to medical information is a social responsibility for financially privileged countries. To that end, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the international biomedical publishing community have developed the Health InterNetwork: Access to Research Initiative, or HINARI (www.healthinternetwork.net). This initiative is an exercise in providing access to research for developing nations. Any relevant not-for-profit institution (medical, nursing, dentistry, or pharmacy school, teaching hospital, health economics institute, or government health department) in any of more than 100 of the poorest countries in the world is entitled to register for free or very low-cost access.

HINARI, which was launched in January 2002, started by providing free access to the journals of six of the largest international biomedical publishers in response to WHO's call to provide information to low-income countries. Since

then, more than 30 publishers have joined the program. Institutions in most countries where the annual GNP is \$1000 per capita or less are entitled to free access. Those in most of the countries that have a GNP of \$1001 to \$3000 are entitled to access the journals at heavily reduced rates. The publishers donate all revenues collected to WHO to be used in training librarians and users in online access.

A second initiative is Scientific Electronic Library Online, or SciELO, a regional initiative in South America (www.scielo.org). SciELO is an electronic library covering a selected collection of scientific journals. The library is an integral part of a project being developed by Fundação do Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo in partnership with the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information. SciELO serves as the model for cooperative electronic publishing of scientific journals on the Internet. It was conceived especially to meet the scientific communication needs of developing countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean.

SciELO provides an efficient way to ensure universal visibility and accessibility to scientific literature to help to overcome the phenomenon known as "lost science". The SciELO model comprises integrated procedures for measuring the use and impact of scientific journals. The SciELO method enables the electronic publication of complete editions of scientific journals, the organization of searchable bibliographic and full-text databases, the preservation of electronic archives, and production of statistical indicators of the use and impact of the scientific literature.

Some features of the SciELO site are an interface for browsing journals and searching articles by title, author, key word, and other options and links to and from other information sources. In Brazil, SciELO has established itself as the major alternative

to strengthen and expand national scientific communication, increasing the visibility and accessibility of the main scientific journals in the country.

The third initiative is the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information, or PERI (www.inasp.info/peri/), of the International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications, or INASP (www.inasp.info). INASP is a network of more than 4000 partners and organizations that share the goal of enabling worldwide access to information and knowledge. INASP was established in 1992 by the International Council for Science as a program of the Committee for the Dissemination of Scientific Information.

The specific objectives of INASP are to map, support, and strengthen existing activities that promote access to and dissemination of scientific and scholarly information and knowledge; to identify, encourage, and support new initiatives that will increase local publication and general access to high-quality scientific and scholarly literature; and to promote in-country capacity to increase information production, organization, access, and dissemination. INASP offers advisory and liaison services that give advice and support on all aspects of literature publication and dissemination, especially in response to institutions in developing and transitional countries; programs that disseminate research results within and between developing countries; and library programs, which include institutional support of professional organizations. PERI is a program of support for information production, access, and dissemination for research partners in developing and transitional countries; it uses new information and communication technologies. Full details of PERI are available at www.inasp.info/peri/. 