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Title

Librarians and the Use of Information Communication Technologies in the Provision of Information on HIV/AIDS in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Health care is among priority sectors in developing countries, especially in Africa. Many people perish daily from infectious and other diseases due to poor health care conditions. There seems to be a great potential in using Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to save human lives by improving health delivery and access to much needed information on HIV/AIDS. Can librarians and the use of information communication technologies really make a difference in providing information on HIV/AIDS?

On the other hand, the challenges faced by medical research today are well known. As you are all aware, HIV/AIDS has emerged as the international health crisis, HIV/AIDS is not just an individual tragedy. It is also threatening to decimate the future prospects of most developing countries, wiping away years of hard-won improvements in development indicators. As a result of the disease, we are witnessing a deterioration in child survival rates, reduced life expectancy, crumbling and overburdened health care systems, the breakdown of family structures and the decimation of a generation in the prime of their working lives.

It is of paramount importance that information on HIV/AIDS is collected and disseminated to policy makers, health professionals and donors and the use of information communication technologies can enhance this. Ready availability of up-to-date information enables timely and informed decision-making, as well as efficient allocation and mobilization of resources.

Information Communication Technologies can be a powerful tool in providing information on supporting the response to HIV/AIDS. This can be achieved through:

- E-mail; websites; CD-ROM
- Information provision, databases, documentation and library access
- List-serves & online discussions
- Web-based discussion groups, workshops & symposia
- Networking
- Information sources, question and answer sites (e-mail or web) and chat rooms for personal support/information
- Online publications
- Video-conferencing
- Involvement with community organizations.

With all the above, librarians can collect, repackage and disseminate information on HIV/AIDS to different sectors in their relevant countries and with all this information I am convinced that it will make a difference.

Responding to the needs and challenges of an AIDS-affected society also calls for wide-ranging new perspectives on research, a greater commitment to multidisciplinary and collaborative research within and between institutions, a wider sharing of knowledge and insights, the establishment of data-bases and information-sharing networks, the facilitation of access to library and other information sources in all parts of the world, and connectivity between professionals in different institutions and also with those working in communities, hospitals, aid agencies, industry, and various government departments. It is obvious that in many of these areas Information Communication Technologies can play a vital facilitating role.

It is important that librarians in developing countries capitalize on the potential offered by Information and Communication Technologies to be more effective in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Of importance is to have this information repackaged and disseminated to different target groups. Information and communication technologies can be used as a powerful tool by librarians in developing countries to share information that will help to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and reduce its impacts