

## Improving knowledge and skills in accessing health information in Africa

The Network of African Medical Librarians, whose mission is to expand the frontiers of knowledge through the training of, and outreach to African librarians, the academic community, health care professionals and policy makers, has produced a training manual entitled – **Finding, organizing and using health information: a training manual for students, researchers and health workers in Africa**. The manual was published in 2011 with support and funding from the U.S. National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health.

The Network is being led by former US National Library of Medicine (NLM) International Associate Fellows. NLM Associate fellows spend one year at the US National Library of Medicine pursuing postgraduate training “designed to provide a broad foundation in health sciences information services and to prepare librarians

for future leadership roles in health sciences libraries and in health services research.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the manual is to build capacity within the academic community and in health care related sectors in finding, organizing and using health information for better health outcomes. The intended audience comprises health sciences students, faculty, healthcare professionals, policy makers, medical librarians and medical journal editors.

Within the network countries of Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Zambia, Mozambique, Mali, and Kenya, the course has been found very useful in training a cross-section of information users, including undergraduate medical students, post graduate students, faculty, health care workers and librarians in information retrieval skills.

The manual has seven modules that can be customized as necessary to meet the needs of the target audience. It is available for free

online:

[http://karibouconnections.net/wordpress/medlibafrica/training\\_module/index.html](http://karibouconnections.net/wordpress/medlibafrica/training_module/index.html). The following seven modules can be used independently or all together as a course:

- Module 1–Information Sources
- Module 2–Searching Tools
- Module 3– Electronic Information Searching Techniques
- Module 4–Intellectual Property Rights
- Module 5–Management of Information
- Module 6–Evaluation of Information
- Module 7–Scholarly Communication Skills

The manual is in English, but is currently being translated into French and Portuguese.

The Network is collaborating with the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (**MEPI**) to help build capacity in information retrieval skills for students and faculty. The following are highlights of the training activities undertaken in some Network and MEPI countries.

In Zambia, on behalf of the Zambia Medical Association (ZMA), the Medical Journal of Zambia, the African Medical Journal Editors Partnership Project (AJPP) and the University of Zambia Medical Library held an information retrieval skills training workshop. The aim was to “provide participants with insights into the various aspects of retrieving information for scientific/medical writing and help them as writers make a positive contribution to the medical world through their work.”

In Uganda, the Albert Cook Medical Library, with support from Medical Education Services for All Ugandans (MESAU)-MEPI, has been conducting training for graduate and undergraduate students in information searching and retrieval skills, and reference management. With the same support, the librarians, in collaboration with the Medical Journal Editors, also co-facilitated a workshop on manuscript writing for authors.

In Zimbabwe, the University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences librarian is a member of the MEPI Zimbabwe management committee. MEPI Zimbabwe has given tremendous support to the College library in its training in **Information Retrieval and Online Research**. The training was designed after a survey was done among students and the academic staff to assess the level of awareness of electronic information resources and information retrieval skills. The results of the survey showed lack of awareness of the resources as well as skills deficit in using them. The main objective of the training therefore is to raise the level of awareness of the electronic information resources and to improve on the information retrieval skills. The training delivered in workshop format targets the academic and administrative staff, postgraduate and undergraduate students as well as researchers. The total number trained so far is 727.

In Nigeria, librarians at E. Latunde Odek Medical Library (ELOML), College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, in collaboration with MEPI Nigeria have organized training workshops for graduate students, resident doctors, junior faculty and undergraduate students on online information searching, access and retrieval skills; use of bibliographic reference management - Zotero and Endnote - and Intellectual Property Rights ( IPR).

1. US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. (2009). Associate Fellowship Program. Available at: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/about/training/associate/proginfo.html> (Accessed 16 March 2012).

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The Network of African Medical Librarians

Meetings

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# Comments by librarians at their planning meeting February 27-March 2, 2012, Kenyatta University, Nairobi

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