Teaching Materials and Services

A New Atlas of Leprosy

A New Atlas of Leprosy authored by A. C. McDougall and Yo Yuasa (2000), is now available on CD-ROM version (December 2002). This has been produced under the Health Development series by e-Teaching Aids At Low Cost (TALC) from UK. This Atlas is available in HTML and PDF format on the same CD.

This pictorial book is very useful to all health care workers to detect, diagnose and treat leprosy cases in their settings. Excellent pictures on differential diagnosis should help to improve diagnostic efficiency.

The CD-ROM can be used to train/orient a small group of health workers/volunteers wherever computer facilities are available. It can be even used to educate a small group of leprosy patients. The CD-ROM is also useful to readers, as it contains some other important topics such as Cochrane Review evidence based medicine (abstracts from medical reviews), developing essential drug policies (by health action international), Kar-Knowledge and Research Programme on Disability and Health Care Technology (news letter), palliative medicine, Public Health Care Laboratory (News letter on Pharmacy), and practical pharmacy for developing countries.

The CD-ROM is available free, and can be obtained from the TALC office: e-TALC, Unit 13, Standingford House, Cave Street, Oxford, OX4,1BA, UK. e-mail: info@e-talc.org.

Tuberculosis resources on the Internet

A paper by Midori Kato-Maeda and Peter M. Small, from the Division of Infectious Diseases and Geographic Medicine, Stanford Medical School University, provides a ‘user’s guide’ to tuberculosis-related resources on the Internet. The abstract of the paper reads:

‘The World Wide Web has become a source of information for clinicians and researchers about virtually every aspect of tuberculosis (TB). We provide information about TB-related Internet portal sites. We classify selected TB-related Web pages according to user needs. The questions that we address are as follows: (1) Where can I find scientific information about TB? (2) Where can I find epidemiologic data? (3) Where can I find literature for laypeople? (4) Where can I find recommendations, guidelines, and clinical decision-making algorithms for management of TB? (5) Where can I find research databases? (6) Where can I find research groups? (7) Where can I find resources for research, teaching, and training? (8) Where can I find information about regulatory action? The total number of TB-related Web pages is immense, their scope is vast, and their content is perpetually changing. Nonetheless, the sites identified here provide the reader with a manageable number of entry points to this increasingly important resource.’

TB vaccines for the world

The First International Conference on ‘TB Vaccines for the World (TBV 2003) will be held on 17–19 September 2003, in Montreal, Canada. One in every three people on earth is believed to be infected with Mycobacterium tuberculosis, leading to 7–8 million cases of active tuberculosis (TB) per year and approximately 3 million deaths annually. This epidemic, like those of most infectious diseases, creates scientific challenges and opportunities as it raises the demand for public health solutions. The currently available weapons for fighting TB are inadequate. The ultimate goal of biomedical TB research is to lessen the public health burden of this disease by developing improved diagnostic, therapeutic, and intervention strategies. Achieving this goal requires a base of knowledge about the biology of M. tuberculosis and related mycobacteria, their interactions with human and animal hosts, and the nature of an effective host-protective immune response. TB researchers are applying this accumulating base of knowledge to developing rapid, easy-to-use diagnostic assays appropriate for low-as well as high-income countries, improving the current complicated therapeutic regimen, identifying potential new drugs to combat multidrug-resistant TB, and creating more effective vaccines (Ann M. Ginsberg, NIAID/NIH, Bethesda, USA).

TBV 2003 will focus attention on ‘Vaccine Issues’ in relation to TB worldwide. TB vaccines is a developing area of activity and TBV 2003 will allow researchers to come together to discuss the latest findings and trends associated with the research and development of TB vaccines.

Training in information management of web-based resources

The following article appears in TDR News, volume 69, November 2002.

An international training course on electronic information management of web-based resources was held in Tanzania, July 2002, under the auspices of HINARI, the Health Internetwork Access to Research Initiative. HINARI, a public-private initiative aiming to bridge the digital divide in health, was launched in 2000 by the United Nations Secretary General. Spearheaded by WHO, the Health InterNetwork brings together international agencies, the private sector, foundations, non-governmental organizations and country partners under the principle of ensuring equitable access to health information. Its focus is on improving the information environment of health personnel in developing countries: professionals, researchers, scientists, policy-makers. The core elements of the project are content, Internet connectivity, and capacity building.

HINARI will enable over 100 countries to benefit from access to global health research. During its first year, the Initiative achieved a major breakthrough when the world’s major biomedical publishers agreed to provide access to more than 2000 scientific publications for free or at low cost to universities, medical schools, research institutions and government offices in low-income countries.

As part of its commitment to capacity building, TDR assists HINARI by providing infrastructure support to selected institutes and organizing training programmes in how to access, organize and manage the wealth of material available on the Internet. Eleven librarians and information managers from seven countries (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda) participated in the workshop in Tanzania on information management of HINARI and other web-based resources. The majority of the participants came from centres forming part of the MIMCom network.

Presentations and hands-on sessions at the workshop covered general computer skills, overview of the Internet, an introduction to the HINARI menu, and how to search publishers’ sites (HINARI menu option). Participants learned to search PubMed and identify and access free information resources on the Internet. They learned how to evaluate the quality of information on the Internet, and how to organize electronic collections including use of EndNote® reference manager software for citation import and management.

Participants also contributed to the evaluation and development of teaching materials. After refinement at a further workshop to be held in the first quarter of 2003 hosted by the WHO regional
office for South East Asia, New Delhi, for selected participants from WPRO and SEARO, these materials will constitute a teaching package to be available from TDR in late 2003.

The workshop clearly demonstrated that access to information is possible in developing countries, despite the fact that high-speed Internet access and a LAN are advised. Internet access at the National Institute of Medical Research in Dar es Salaam, while not perfect, allowed all participants to learn and gain experience in real time.

HINARI is expected to have implications that extend beyond access to information. It is envisioned that better and timely information will increase the capacity of scientists and health care workers in developing countries to participate in the global research agenda; to better set national research and health care priorities; and to increase their countries’ self-reliance in developing evidenced-based strategies and tools for the prevention, control and treatment of disease.

The international training course on electronic information management of HINARI and other web-based resources was hosted by the National Institute for Medical Research, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

New TALC catalogue

The new TALC catalogue for 2003 is now available. TALC is now accepting books from many publishers, and the list contains many new items, including CD-ROMs and slide collections. Further information can be obtained from the TALC website, www.talcuk.org, or by e-mail (info@talcuk.org).

e-TALC

The following article appears on TALC’s website (www.talcuk.org).

To support TALC’s continuing work in providing low cost health information TALC has initiated a pioneering project to provide free information to health workers in the developing countries on CD-ROM. Although availability of computers is still limited in the developing countries it is growing fast, while access to the Internet is still very poor, due to cost and poor telephone systems.

CD-ROMs can store large quantities of high quality information. They can be produced and distributed at low cost.

This service is designed to achieve the following:

• Production of CD-ROMs with search engines, containing copyright free information. The CD-ROMs are easy to use and have the potential to be interactive (e.g. for training purposes).
• The CD-ROMs will provide free access to up-to-date and appropriate health and development information and training materials for health workers.
• A low cost method for health workers, libraries, government and non-governmental organizations to distribute health information and training resources.
• A vehicle for the exchange of ideas.

The CD-ROMs will allow users to select, adapt and tailor materials to meet local needs and develop their own Library of materials at very low cost. Information on the CD-ROM can be downloaded, e-mailed or printed and freely reproduced and shared. The project has already met with a great deal of interest, and TALC is developing partnerships with a number of major organizations that wish to use the service.

TALC would also like to hear from organizations from developing countries that have appropriate material that would benefit from wider circulation via the e-TALC CD-ROM.

If you would like more information or would like to receive a copy of the CD-ROM or are interested in putting material on it please contact: e-TALC, c/o PO Box 49, St Albans, Herts AL1 5TX, UK. e-mail: e-talc@talcuk.org; website: www.e-talc.org.
Communicable diseases information resources—tuberculosis

The World Health Organization has published an impressive list of significant publications on tuberculosis (Communicable diseases information resources, no. 7, January 2001–December 2002). Items added since the previous catalogue include:


The catalogue can be obtained from CDS Information Resource Centre, World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. Fax: +41 22 791 42 85; e-mail: cdsdoc@who.int. It is also available on-line as a downloadable PDF file at http://who.int/infectious-disease-news.

Topics in International Health CD-ROM

The Topics in International Health series has been developed by the Wellcome Trust for use as an interactive educational resource in tropical and international health. The series is designed for use by medical and life science students, researchers, and healthcare professionals.

All the information on the CD-ROMs has been reviewed by experts to ensure that it is comprehensive, accurate, and up to date. The topics are presented in a clear and simple format to help explain complex concepts.

Three complementary resources are contained on each of these unique CD-ROMs: a selection of interactive tutorials, an image collection and a glossary. Each part in the series focuses on a disease or group of diseases of worldwide importance.

Tutorials are highly visual, structured learning tools. The tutorials include objectives, self-assessment tests, a list of key references to encourage further reading, and summary screens to reinforce the crucial points. Key areas covered include:

- The latest epidemiological data on leprosy from the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Current WHO treatment regimens for multidrug therapy.
- Comprehensive information on the WHO and Ridley–Jopling systems of classification.
- Detailed and fully illustrated guides to the histopathological and clinical aspects of the Ridley–Jopling classification.
- A comprehensive guide to all aspects of ocular leprosy—diagnosis, treatment and prevention of blindness.
- How to treat and prevent physical impairment in leprosy.
- When, why and how to take skin biopsies and slit-skin smears.
- Prevention and control of leprosy to WHO elimination levels.

The Image Collection comprises approximately 1000 images, carefully selected to complement the tutorials. Each image is accompanied by a detailed description, searchable keywords, and disease and aetiological agent classifications.

The Glossary defines the medical and scientific terms used in the tutorials and image descriptions. It has an easy-to-use interface, and will help users who are unfamiliar with medical terminology or whose first language is not English.

For orders and enquiries, please contact: CAB International, Wallingford, Oxon OX10 8DE, UK. Tel: +44 1491 832111; Fax: +44 1491 829292; e-mail: publishing@cabi.org. Customers in North
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**Local health content in Nigeria**

The following article appeared in Information Development, vol. 18, no. 3, September 2002 (source: http://www.icontact-online.org/).

A study funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) helps communities in Nigeria to use ICTs to document traditional healthcare knowledge. The Fantsuam Foundation, whose members are women’s groups in rural communities in Kaduna State, has worked with rural women to try to understand various traditional healthcare practices and, where appropriate, to introduce ‘best practice’ and safer techniques. The project recognizes the role of traditional medicine, especially in communities where it is the only healthcare available. These communities have a largely oral tradition with very little information in written form. This project is the first attempt to document their traditional health knowledge and skills. Such knowledge remains the property of the communities.

In addition to the knowledge and information collected from the population, other sources of health information are regularly consulted for information that can be adapted and grafted into the existing body of local knowledge and practices. The health channel of the WorldSpace Radio, Satlife, WHO fact sheets, and numerous discussion lists are translated into the local dialect and shared with the women.

Information sharing is not a problem commonly encountered among the ordinary villagers. It is the traditional healers who feel threatened by dissemination of their knowledge and skills.

Some lessons from the project:

- Start with the knowledge base available within the community and build from there.
- Developing local content cannot stand alone—it should be conducted within the context of a wider community health programme to facilitate its sustainability.
- It is possible to evolve an information management system that preserves traditional knowledge and practices while making it receptive to new ideas about healthcare.
- Traditional medical knowledge has aspects that can be modified and improved for better healthcare delivery.
- Local content that is largely determined by the host community has a better chance of being adapted, upgraded and improved through additional external information from orthodox medicine.
- Traditional knowledge is amenable to modernization if the effort is one of partnership. Intellectual property rights can be safeguarded while making the knowledge available to all members of the host community.
- It is important to have access to regular updates of reliable health information from a variety of sources.
- There is a need for local capacity for the translation of externally generated information from sources such as textbooks, newspapers, journals and the Internet into the local dialect.