Librarians Without Borders: Building In-Country Research and Information Provision Capability

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Global Commitment

Global commitment for the Medical Library Association (MLA) is not a series of talking points or an informative Website, but a program that reflects a deep commitment to internationalism and outreach. One of the keys to understanding MLA’s global commitment is the association’s international strategic statement which underscores the importance of partnerships and the need to build in-country capacity through qualified librarians, technology, and information access. This includes collection development and infrastructure.1

MLA supports capacity building programs at the association, section, chapter, and individual member areas.

MLA believes that building capacity will be most effective and long-lasting when partnerships are created with groups sharing similar goals, particularly partnerships with international agencies where shared goals intersect with available expertise and infrastructure.1

As part of this strategy, the MLA/Librarians Without Borders (LWB) program was formally established in 2005 as MLA’s organizational structure for its global outreach. One of the most successful programs is the grant-funded E-Library Training Initiative.

E-library Training Initiative

The MLA/Librarians Without Borders (LWB) e-library training initiative was established in 20072 and is funded in part by the generous support of the Elsevier Foundation. It provides access to quality health information training through distance education programs and the mobilization of volunteers for in-country training and workshops. Besides the Elsevier Foundation, MLA also partners with the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) Access to Research in Health Programme, the Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa (ITOCA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) among others. HINARI is included in the Research4Life program that is a public-private partnership between WHO, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and others with 190 science publishers facilitated by the International Association of STM Publishers. MLA has also worked with other partners to support this program including the World Health Organization’s European, Western Pacific, and Southeast Asia and Eastern Mediterranean Regional Offices, the Pan American Health Organization, and the Ministries of Health, universities, medical schools, libraries, and hospitals in the countries and cities where the workshops were held. The partnership’s goal is to reduce the gap in scientific knowledge between industrialized countries and the developing world by providing long-term training on the use of online resources through a variety of training modules.3

HINARI was established in 2002 with six publishers including Blackwell, Elsevier Science, the Harcourt World STM Group, Wolters Kluwer International Health & Science, Springer Verlag, and John Wiley that provided free or low cost online access to about 1,500 journals in biomedical and related social sciences to local, not-for-profit institutions in developing countries. HINARI has grown to more than 150 publishers offering more than 37,000 information resources.4

E-Library Training Coordinator, Lenny Rhine, has coordinated the e-library training initiative since its inception. He has taught almost 1,000 people in twenty-nine countries around the world including library staff members, researchers, university faculty, physicians and nurses, medical students, Ministries of Health, public health staff, pharmacists, medical journals, and academic institutions. The library profession as a whole, including medical librarians, are the ability of each nation to deliver quality health care, breaking down the barriers of language and access, and minimizing the cost for local institutions to access to information.

In-country training programs are not a series of talking points or an informative website. They are the ability of each nation to deliver quality health care, breaking down the barriers of language and access, and minimizing the cost for local institutions to access to information.

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