Creating Research Capacity in Developing Countries
The Role of International Collaborative Networks of Information Professionals

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Summary

• Partners in vision care, education & research:
  - Resource Centres (RCs) supporting Community Centres of Ophthalmology (CCOs)
  - AVSL, an international network of vision librarians
  - Not-for-profit agencies: SEVA, Lavelle Fund
  - For-profit agencies: Google

• Working in cooperation with Vision 2020 to build health capacity in developing countries
Background:
Problems & Players
The Problem

• More than 300 million in world visually impaired (270 with low vision; 45 million blind) [1]
• Blindness is an important barrier to development
• 90% of blind live in low-income countries
• 80% of all blindness can be prevented or cured [1]
Vision 2020: The Right to Sight

- Initiative by WHO and more than 20 international nongovernmental organizations
- Aim is to prevent 100 million from becoming blind by the year 2020.

• SEVA Foundation
  - Mission to alleviate suffering caused by disease & poverty
  - CCOs are one of current projects
Community Centers for Ophthalmology

Kilimanjaro Center for Community Ophthalmology

Photo source: http://www.seva.org/tanzania.php
Association of Vision Science Librarians (AVSL)

AVSL www.avsl.org is:
- An international organization
- Over 130 members in 26 countries
- Members communicate 24/7 via listserv
- Supports resource sharing and collegial assistance

http://www.avsl.org/

- Private companies
- Professional associations
- Other vision-related organizations
Action:
The iconnect Workshops
iconnect 2007

Lions Aravind Institute of Community Ophthalmology (LAICO)
Madurai, India
March, 2007
LAICO Library: A Model Resource Centre

- Support to user community, including satellite hospitals:
  - Aids in set-up of local digital libraries
  - Conducts Continuing Education
- Provides 6 month internships for new information professionals
- Digitizes local information, to promote sharing
Workshop Goals

- To plan and lay the foundation for the development and maintenance of information resource centers at “Community Centres for Ophthalmology” in developing countries (India, Nepal, Tanzania, Guatemala and Egypt).

- To build a community of Resource Center professionals
Working Session
iconnect 2007
Out of iconnect 2007:

Recognition of importance of
• Community
• Collection
• Connection
iconnect 2008

Lumbini Eye Institute (LEI)
Siddharthanagar, Nepal
February, 2008
LEI Library: A Success Story

• LEI established 1983
• Library
  - From one bookshelf to full-fledged unit of LEI
• Successes:
  - HINARI and INASP access
  - Membership in AVSL = improved access to international journals
  - Networking has materially improved quality of research
• Challenges remain
National Workshop on Vision Science Resource Centre Collaboration

- Funded with small grant from the INASP
- Primary aim:
  - To bring together vision science librarians of Nepal
  - To share current practices & to develop & expand the iconnect network of librarians
  - Expand interlibrary sharing of information and knowledge of online resources
Ultimate goal of workshops:
To participate in the reduction of blindness through improved access to learning resources and management tools
Continuing Challenges

- Meager access to information resources, for many reasons, including costs
- Lack of trained staff
- Lack of awareness of resources, including OA, HINARI
- Infrastructure problems
Successes

- AVSL has many new members,
- Exchange program is strong
- Expertise is shared widely
- Mentorship relationships have developed
- Grant funding is being explored
Librarians themselves are key to the knowledge infrastructure that will help make the goals of Vision 2020 a reality.

Photo sources:

ICML 2009
We believe our future is so bright, we need shades!

Thank you!

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