

## People are dying for lack of knowledge. Can EASE help to prevent this?

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More research on health care is being conducted and published than ever before, yet people are still dying for lack of knowledge. Tens of thousands of people die needlessly every day and the lack of healthcare information is a major cause. People die because they or the people caring for them do not have access to the information and knowledge they need, when they need it, to make appropriate decisions regarding both prevention and treatment. Improving the availability and use of information could prevent millions of children dying of pneumonia or diarrhoea or malaria, or prevent women dying of haemorrhage after labour.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations in the year 2000 include an important set of challenges for global health to be fulfilled by the year 2015 such as reducing child mortality rates, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, as well as eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development<sup>1</sup>.

Universal access to information for health professionals is a prerequisite for meeting the MDGs. Yet, despite the Internet revolution and the number of successful initiatives worldwide to increase the availability of free online resources, there are still major barriers to knowledge-based health care in less economically developed countries<sup>2</sup>. *The Lancet* recently published a themed issue on Universal Health Coverage<sup>3</sup> providing an updated global discussion on MDGs under different perspectives; most articles in the issue stress the concept that services should be available when needed without causing financial hardship to the user. Alongside economic considerations, progress towards the MDGs can be accelerated through improved communication, understanding and advocacy among those involved in the production, exchange and use of knowledge.

In this regard, EASE members, a community of people sharing an interest in science communication and editing, may wish to know more about the MDGs and the relevant initiatives in progress at global level to support their achievements.

HIFA2015, Healthcare Information For All by 2015, is one of the many initiatives in support of the MDGs. It is a global campaign and knowledge network which has the goal that “by 2015 every person worldwide will have access to an informed healthcare provider”. It is administered by the Global Healthcare Information Network, a non-profit organisation working to improve the quality of health care in less economically developed countries. One-third of HIFA2015 members are based in Africa, one-third in Europe, and one-third in the rest of the world. Together they are working for a future where people are no longer dying for lack of basic healthcare knowledge. HIFA2015 represents more than 5,000 health workers, librarians, publishers, researchers and policymakers in more than 2000 organisations across 167 countries worldwide.

To date over 160 organisations worldwide have declared their commitment to the HIFA2015 goal.

Members interact mainly by two email discussion forums: HIFA2015 and CHILD2015. Membership is free and open to all stakeholders to exchange experiences, expertise and ideas on how to improve access to healthcare information. Discussions are very informal and provide information at different levels on health-related issues from around the world.

Requests and advice circulating in the forum should help develop the HIFA2015 Knowledge Base<sup>4</sup>, a searchable, multilingual database, using the so called HIFA-Lumps (extracts from HIFA forum, properly selected and ordered according to a metadata scheme allowing for searching and coupling of key elements). This Knowledge Base, predicted to be released in 2013, will contribute to the planning and implementation of current and future healthcare information activities, build a shared analysis of issues and priorities, collate evidence to persuade governments and funding agencies to invest in cost-effective solutions, etc.

EASE recognises the value of HIFA2015 and the role that its members can play to support the campaign and improve communication of health related information. That is why EASE applied to join HIFA as a supporting organisation in June 2012 and we are glad to communicate that the application received HIFA2015 approval.

EASE members can provide assistance and advice to authors and editors where it is most needed and eventually be involved in training activities in collaboration of local institutions; at the same time they can learn from this extraordinary global network of people striving for global health.

I joined HIFA some months ago and learned a lot by listening to the voice of people who share ideas, experiences, information and links through a solution-focused email forum connecting health care workers, publishers, editors, librarians, information specialists from health districts in rural villages, local hospitals, as well as academic and research institutions and associations, spread all over the world.

To know more please visit the website [www.hifa2015.org](http://www.hifa2015.org) and subscribe to HIFA forums.

Special thanks to Neil Pakenham-Walsh, Coordinator of HIFA2015 and CHILD2015; Co-director, Global Healthcare Information Network

### References

- 1 <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/index.htm> (accessed 23 October 2012).
- 2 Godlee F, Pakenham-Walsh N, Ncayiyana D, Cohen B, Packer A. Can we achieve health information for all by 2015? *The Lancet* 2004;364(9430):295–300. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(04)16681-6
- 3 [No authors listed] The struggle for universal health coverage. *The Lancet* 2012;380(9845):859. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(12)61485-8
- 4 Concept Note for HIFA2015 Knowledge Base. Available at <http://www.hifa2015.org/wp-content/uploads/HIFA2015-Knowledge-Base-Concept-Paper-August-2010.pdf> (accessed 23 October 2012).