Equitable access to health information

Despite the exponential growth in the amount of research produced annually and the increasing number of journal titles, “inequitable access to both production and consumption of health information for all” poses serious concerns. In the post-Gutenberg era, the public could use print journals freely. Ironically, in the Internet age, research is no longer freely accessible to anyone, anywhere, as many publishers limit access to licensed electronic editions. Inaccessibility to extant published research includes restrictions on readership to subscribers, as well as limitations on authors’ use of their own work in teaching, dissemination, and archiving. Aside from affecting the scientific community, this “inequitable access to quality health information could result in poor health planning and … delivery which adversely affect the health conditions of the public.”

Cognizant of this need, the Singapore Declaration on Equitable Access to Health Information in the Western Pacific Region was adopted on November 5, 2009 during the Second Joint Meeting of the Asia Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors (APAME) and the Western Pacific Region Index Medicus (WPRIM) convened by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Singapore Medical Journal. Dr. Shin Young-Soo, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, hailed this “very special occasion to adopt a meaningful declaration on equitable access to health research.”

The declaration confirmed the promotion of “free, universal dissemination and access to quality health information” through the WPRIM and Global Health Library (GHL) and by means of networks, conferences, and events to “educate and empower editors, peer reviewers and authors in generating quality scientific and technical publications.”

Calling on “member states of the Western Pacific Region,” “stakeholders from the public and private sectors,” national and international organizations, governments and other editors’ associations for support, conference participants committed to “peer-to-peer relationships ... to maintain balance, work out ideas and provide mutual support” ... “to achieve and maintain internationally acceptable, but regionally realistic, scholarly standards.” The declaration was formally launched at the International Forum on Academic Medical Publishing on November 6, 2009, organized jointly by the Singapore Medical Journal and National Cancer Center Singapore (NCC), and sponsored by the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) and APAME.

The Philippine Journal of Ophthalmology was one of only two candidate journals from the Philippines presented to and approved by the Regional Journal Selection Committee of the WPRIM on the first day of the meeting. The WPRIM platform was developed and hosted by the Institute of Medical Information (IMI) and the Library of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences (CAMS) and will be fully operational in 2010. It can be accessed at http://wprim.wpro.who.int/SearchBasic.php, together with the Philippine Journal of Otolaryngology which was the sole candidate journal from the Philippines for 2008, and with which it shares a common history.

The then Philippine Journal of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology is recorded as having been published between 1955 and 1969 when it was indexed in the old MEDLINE with NLM ID: 0404460 [Serial]. Other ID numbers of the Philippine Journal of Otolaryngology were (DNLM)P12720000(s) and (OCoLC)49457792, with Call Number W1PH571. The earliest available indexed issue is v.7 (1955)-v.8: no. 3 (1956) and the latest available issue is v.22: no.1/2 (1970). PubMed lists two available indices of Philippine literature in ophthalmology and otolaryngology from 1946 to 1955, and from 1956 to 1960, from which time onward, we were shrouded in darkness.
The indexing of the *Philipp J Ophthalmol* and the *Philipp J Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg* in WPRIM brings our literature to view once again. We anticipate the dawn of a new day for our specialties and our journals, our colleagues and our students, our readers and our patients.

**References**

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