Global Access to Aging Information and the Gerontology Healthy Ageing Portal

Lisa E. Skemp, PhD, RN; Ji Woon Ko, MSN, RN; Cliff Missen, MA; and Diane Peterson, MA

ABSTRACT
Nursing, gerontology, and information communications technologies are well positioned to influence gerontological health system development by promoting global access to evidence-based best practices that facilitate local access to knowledge. Gerontological nurses, as members of the global community, are encouraged to become partners in promoting active and healthy aging. One mechanism is by participating in the development of a Gerontology Healthy Ageing Portal in the eGranary Digital Library, an “Internet in a Box” that provides offline digital resources to institutions and individuals where Internet access is lacking or unpredictable.

"Knowledge is power only if it is shared. If kept, it is a burden." (Al-Shorbaji, 2009)

Global aging is an issue for both developed and developing countries. The increased proportion of older people in the population is particularly relevant for developing countries and rural areas in the United States that have not had the opportunity to prepare for this rapid population shift (Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2008; Kinsella & He, 2009; World Health Organization [WHO], 2006). While a larger proportion of older adults in the population brings opportunities for promoting active participation in society and the building of balanced and healthy communities, there is also an associated increase in chronic noncommunicable health conditions (WHO, 2002).

Chronic noncommunicable diseases now account for 85% of the burden of disease in high-income countries and 44% in low- to middle-income countries (National Institute on Aging, 2007). If not addressed, the lack of prevention or poor management of chronic health conditions and the resulting concomitant disabilities will lead to worse population health outcomes. Additionally, in developing countries and the rural United States, aging is of particular concern because of a growing health care workforce shortage and unequal access to health information (Rogers, 2002; U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2009; WHO, 2006).

ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is a main driver of improved health outcomes (IOM, 2009). Deaton (2004) contended that while income is one of the determinants of population health, the transmission of health-related knowledge is more important. The health and life expectancy of the vast majority of mankind, whether they live in rich or poor countries, depends on ideas, therapies, and ongoing care. This is why it is important to develop knowledge around health outcomes.

Telecommunications technology has lessened the geographic boundaries that previously separated us and allowed us to exchange ideas, techniques, and therapies developed elsewhere. In this manner, knowledge can now be shared as a global resource.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Skemp is Director, Global Health Initiatives, John A. Hartford Center of Geriatric Nursing Excellence, and Associate Professor, Adult and Gerontological Nursing, Ms. Ko is a doctoral candidate, The University of Iowa College of Nursing, Mr. Missen is Director, WiderNet Project, and Professor, School of Library and Information Science, and Ms. Peterson was a graduate student, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, and is currently Owner, Daily Dimensions Computer Services, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The authors disclose that they have no significant financial interests in any product or class of products discussed directly or indirectly in this activity. The WiderNet Project is supported in part by Intel Corporation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and Seagate International.

Address correspondence to Lisa E. Skemp, PhD, RN, Associate Professor, Adult and Gerontological Nursing, The University of Iowa College of Nursing, 488 NB, Iowa City, IA 52242; e-mail: lisa-skemp@uiowa.edu.

POSTED: December 22, 2010

doi:10.3928/00989134-20101202-01

Copyright © SLACK Incorporated
damental determinant of population health. (pp. 83-84)

Information and communication technologies (ICT) facilitate access to knowledge and information and create an excellent opportunity for nursing intervention and leadership (Abbott & Coenen, 2008). When health care providers, patients, and families need information, they are increasingly using websites to access health care information (Harrison & Lee, 2006). A recent Google search on “aging” elicited 48,900,000 sources, and 138,000 sources were identified for “healthy aging.”

Access to the Internet, however, does not ensure that users know how to navigate websites to get the best evidence-based and culturally appropriate information. Furthermore, four of five people worldwide do not have any or dependable access to the Internet, according to the International Telecommunications Union (2010), with Internet penetration being less than 1% in the world’s poorest countries. One mechanism to address this inequity in information access is to deploy offline information storage that requires no Internet.

The purpose of this article is to describe the eGranary Digital Library, an offline information resource that mimics the Internet by mirroring more than 1,200 websites, and discuss the ongoing development of a focused healthy aging and gerontology portal on eGranary. The gerontology portal and eGranary are part of the larger WiderNet Project at The University of Iowa. Opportunities for participation by gerontological nurses are highlighted.

**WIDERNET PROJECT AND ONSITE DIGITAL LIBRARIES**

The WiderNet Project is a service organization based out of The University of Iowa School of Library and Information Science. It provides resources, coaching, training, computers, and educational materials to schools, clinics, libraries, and homes with poor digital communication resources in dozens of developing countries, as well as regions in the United States where information access is poor (WiderNet, n.d.). The concept of the eGranary was born while one of the authors (C.M.) was working with villagers in Africa who identified a need and “hunger” for current information. Similar to how a granary stores seeds for the next planting season of crops that provide the food to sustain survival of villagers, the eGranary Digital Library stores electronically captured information for people to use to improve health, education, and social welfare.

Currently, the eGranary Digital Library is installed at more than 350 hospitals, clinics, and schools worldwide, serving close to 1 million patrons.

The eGranary Digital Library is a collection of more than 14 million electronic files, including copies of websites, textbooks, journals, multimedia presentations, and an array of digital resource materials on a wide range of topics. These materials come from thousands of credible sources and organizations, including more than 1,000 authors and publishers who have contributed copyrighted material to this collection. Librarians at The University of Iowa work with stakeholders to identify, copy, and catalog content pertinent to their topics and research programs. All of this information is easily searchable and is contained on a computer disk drive that is physically delivered to institutions in developing countries where there is no Internet connection.