

# Technology Offers New Opportunities for Partners

*By Martin Saggese*

The continuing revolution in the development of new technologies over the past two years has dramatically increased the opportunities for AIHA partners to communicate with each other and share information. The choice of information technology as a secondary theme of the 1996 NIS partnership conference is thus no accident. The conference will provide an important opportunity to showcase new technologies and the role they are playing in enriching the work of partner hospitals and health ministries.

From the beginning of the partnership program in 1992, AIHA has used technology to promote partnership goals. The first step was to ensure that all partners had computers and e-mail accounts and knew how to use them to communicate with each other. In 1993, the AIHA Information Clearinghouse was launched, with the goal of providing medical information to partners in both English and Russian.

Over the past year, AIHA has significantly expanded its support for technology initiatives, with the creation of the AIHA World Wide Web site, the initiation of Connections, AIHA's new on-line newsletter, the implementation of the Learning Resource Center Project, and the first use of satellite-based videoconferencing between the US and Moscow and most recently to Dubna, Russia. AIHA has set the goal of having all partnerships able to access and capable of using the World Wide Web by the end of 1996.

## **Strategic Goals**

Under AIHA's current technology strategy, all of its technology activities are geared toward fulfilling one or more of the following three goals:

1. Creating "channels," that is, using technology to create new ways for partners to share information. Examples of AIHA activities that support this goal include providing partners with computers and software to access e-mail and the Internet; upgrading telephone lines to improve the quality and speed of modem communications; funding hardware and communications time for videoconferencing in some locations; and making the AIHA Web site available for partners to post information.
2. Building capacity in the NIS/CEE partners. Activities include AIHA-sponsored training for partners in using computers, the Internet and videoconferencing or distance-learning hardware; providing technology-based training and reference materials (CD-ROM, World Wide Web, video); providing translations of medical materials through the AIHA Web site; and using the AIHA Web site to create links to other Web sites that contain valuable clinical or training information for NIS/CEE medical staff.
3. Promoting sustainability. AIHA's efforts include providing the funding for computer or videoconferencing hardware; supplying telemedicine software or communications upgrades; and encouraging partners to use the "channels" that have been created to carry out programs that will have long-term benefits for the NIS/CEE partners.

## **Des Moines Conference**

The past accomplishments and future possibilities of AIHA partners' efforts in distance learning, telemedicine and information-sharing projects will all be on display at the NIS partnership conference in Des Moines, Iowa in October. Demonstrations will include technologies that are CD-ROM and Internet-based, as well as those that use international telephone lines or satellite connections.

Prior to the conference, a five-day workshop will be held for information coordinators from 36 NIS partner hospitals, covering topics such as advanced Internet training, preparation of partner Web pages and use of the Internet to search for clinical materials. Conference sessions will highlight use of the Internet to access materials on women's health; training in how to access medical databases using the Web; and partners' experiences in using videoconferencing technologies. A special panel will highlight specific examples of how technology is helping to meet the needs of practicing physicians in the NIS in areas such as neonatology, pediatrics and toxicology. Iowa hospitals have been leaders in the use of telemedicine, and conference participants will have the chance to visit Methodist Hospital in Des Moines to see how telemedicine is being used to improve diagnosis in the neonatology unit.

An important evolution has taken place in AIHA's approach to technology over the past year. Technology and information activities have moved from being a relatively minor and somewhat peripheral part of AIHA's program to being a key tool that partners are using to accomplish their programmatic goals and extend their reach. Technology and information activities are now becoming deeply integrated into the partnership methodology, and it is that transformation that will be highlighted and celebrated in Des Moines.

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