

EurasiaHealth Knowledge Network:

An Internet Resource for Healthcare Professionals in the NIS and CEE

BY KATHRYN UTAN

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Focusing on 10 general healthcare fields, the EurasiaHealth Knowledge Network brings the most up-to-date research, articles, clinical practice guidelines, and other resources to professionals in even the remotest of locations. These materials, translated into Russian or other languages native to the NIS and CEE regions—along with links to colleagues and experts from around the world—form the crux of EurasiaHealth.

Medicine is not practiced in a vacuum, although it can seem that way to many healthcare practitioners in the NIS and CEE who are cut off from information and regular contact with their peers simply because they live and work in remote regions. Compounding the problem, decades of isolation from evidence-based medical research conducted in other nations has led to a serious lack of knowledge and resources available to clinicians, educators, scientists, and other medical professionals in the former Soviet Bloc.

To help fill this void, AIHA has launched the EurasiaHealth Knowledge

Network (www.eurasiahealth.org), an on-line clearinghouse featuring a library of multilingual health resources, databases, and interactive forums. This clearinghouse—designed to serve as a repository for clinical practice guidelines, medical textbooks, and other educational materials available in Russian and other NIS/CEE languages—provides users with access to research, tools, and training to enhance the knowledge of healthcare professionals throughout these regions and beyond.

“Over the past several years, AIHA has been focusing on building capacity in its partner institutions in the NIS and

CEE by creating channels that improve access to information through use of the Internet. In doing so, we have found that partners and other health professionals in the NIS and CEE are increasingly hungry for more quality information, particularly in their native languages,” states Mark Storey, program officer for AIHA’s information and communication technology department. “Through the EurasiaHealth Knowledge Network, AIHA is contributing to the growing body of health and medical resources available in many languages not only to partners, but to the broader community of physicians, nurses, students, and other health professionals who have access to the Internet,” Storey explains.

A Broad Range of Accessible Knowledge

EurasiaHealth builds upon the experiences and resources that have been developed over the past decade through AIHA’s healthcare partnership program. While it addresses all aspects of health and medicine in the NIS and CEE, EurasiaHealth’s primary focus lies in 10 subject areas—community health, emergency medicine, health management, HIV/AIDS, infection control, maternal and child health, medical informatics, nursing, primary healthcare, and women’s health. These areas represent common, critical issues throughout the region, and AIHA’s partnership programs have developed a wide range of materials and resources addressing them.

AIHA is working with various part-

ner organizations to develop additional native-language content in each of these critical subject areas. With the HIV/AIDS Knowledge Network, for example, AIHA has collaborated with Medical Advocates for Social Justice—a professional association of physicians and other health-care researchers and providers—to identify and translate important documents related to mother-to-child transmission of HIV and other topics related to the management and prevention of HIV/AIDS. AIHA has also partnered with the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) to translate and disseminate materials on antibiotic resistance through the Infection Control Knowledge Network.

Another key feature of EurasiaHealth is its network of regularly updated databases that literally puts information at the fingertips of health professionals in even the most remote areas of the world. Users can search the multilingual library to find educational documents and other materials in their native language, or look for news about upcoming events in the medical conferences database. Other databases provide information on regional health projects, regional contacts, Internet medical sites, grants and funding resources, glossary terms, and links to healthcare organizations throughout these regions.

According to Elena Gulyaeva, coordinator of the Nursing Resource Center (NRC) at the Republican Medical College in Almaty, Kazakhstan, access to current information is positively invaluable. “As a nursing college professional, I am interested in full-text, Russian-language materials on nursing care and management. These are relatively new topics for us and the use of management and marketing tools in the practice of medicine is a concept that frightens even those who must teach such subjects,” Gulyaeva as-

serts, noting that in her quest for related materials she turned to the EurasiaHealth Knowledge Network. “After searching the site, I found a very interesting article on the development of nursing in Russia—a wonderful piece by Dina Yafasova and Peter Skill Yote—so I am comfortable in saying that EurasiaHealth is not only well done in the dependable and classic AIHA style, but is very interesting and informative in terms of its content.”

Linking People and Information

EurasiaHealth also features a variety of interactive features—a chat room, a teleconsultation forum, and a set of Internet mailing lists, for example—that allow healthcare professionals to communicate and consult directly with one another. In addition to providing a medium for impromptu discussions among healthcare providers, the EurasiaHealth chat room hosts periodic events with featured speakers. The teleconsultation forum supplies a template for clinicians to post information about interesting or difficult cases. It also enables them to request feedback from hundreds of colleagues and specialists at partner institutions around the world. These consultation requests are then sent out via the EurasiaTeleconsult Internet mailing list.

For Janet Thurston, a certified nurse midwife and family nurse practitioner in Fairbanks, Alaska, the Internet is absolutely essential for maintaining open lines of communication with colleagues around the world. Also active with the International Cross Cultural Alcohol Program (InterCCAP)—which facilitates professional exchanges for doctors, public health specialists, and educators—Thurston first came across EurasiaHealth while doing an online search for information about women’s health in Russia.

“InterCCAP brings together health-

care professionals and others from Alaska and the Siberian republic of Sakha (Yakutia) to compare methods of addressing mutual problems such as alcoholism in rural communities, fetal alcohol syndrome, and domestic violence,” Thurston says, noting that indigenous populations in both Alaska and Siberia share similar cultural beliefs, climates, and lifestyles, making these exchanges particularly successful. “The benefit of using EurasiaHealth is that it increases my ability to find out about regional conferences and connect with other professionals to facilitate a strategy to work together more effectively. The Internet is absolutely essential for maintaining communication and I like to have timely information about other programs and initiatives—especially those relating to opportunities to work on joint projects that involve the United States and Russia,” she explains.

Thomas Riesterer, a medical industries professional formerly with Parke-Davis’ Central and Eastern Europe division and now based in Freiburg, Germany, agrees that EurasiaHealth is very useful for connecting with people far and wide who are working on similar issues. “I regard the site as a valuable platform not only for healthcare providers from the NIS and CEE who are having difficulty identifying products and treatments that are effective and economically feasible, but for companies looking to expand into this relatively untapped market.”

Whether the goal is to obtain data and research not readily available through other sources, to consult with experts on a difficult or unusual case, or to establish mutually beneficial contacts within the healthcare profession and related fields, the EurasiaHealth Knowledge Network bridges the gap between isolation and information. ■