

Singapore Declaration on Equitable Access to Health Information in the Western Pacific Region

J T Arokiasamy, MPH

Dean and Professor of Community Medicine, Melaka Manipal Medical College, and Vice President, Asia Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors

PREAMBLE

As part of an initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) to establish a virtual Global Health Library, the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific has developed the Western Pacific Regional Index Medicus, or WPRIM, to facilitate the sharing, exchange and management of health knowledge. It is recognized that articles in peer-reviewed journals contain information that is essential for health services, health sciences, health policy and public health promotion. The need to access research publications from work done in the various countries of the Region has resulted in each country's National Journal Selection Committee screening their journals using certain minimum criteria. Those selected are recommended to be part of the WPRIM.

At the second meeting on the Western Pacific Region Index Medicus, participants agreed to form a regional association of medical journal editors and to name it the Asia Pacific Association of Medical Editors (APAME). The vision of APAME is to promote health care through the dissemination of high-quality knowledge and information on medicine in the Asia Pacific Region. It is a nongovernmental, nonpartisan and nonprofit organization that intends to support and promote medical journalism in the Asia Pacific Region by fostering networking, education, discussion and exchange of information and knowledge. It is closely affiliated with the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, which hosts the

WPRIM. Cooperation with the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), EMAME, Forum for African Medical Editors (FAME) and other international associations in the field of medical journal publishing is sought and encouraged.

Membership is open to editors, previous editors, editorial assistants of peer-reviewed medical journals and those working in any branch of scientific communication in their capacity as Editor-In-Chief, Deputy, Associate, Assistant, Supplement and Managing Editors or scientists and technologists, from Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region. Associate membership is also available. APAME is open to online membership applications and details of this and the association can be found in their website <http://www.wpro.who.int/apame>

Information on WPRIM can be found at the following site: http://www.wpro.who.int/information_sources/library_services/wprim.htm

At the most recent joint meeting of APAME and WPRIM, held in Singapore in November 2009, the Singapore Declaration on equitable access to health information was adopted and signed. It was recommended that medical journals in Region should publish the declaration. The Medical Journal of Malaysia carries this declaration in this issue.

THE DECLARATION

We, the participants in the Joint Meeting of the Asia Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors (APAME) and the Western Pacific Region Index Medicus (WPRIM) held in Singapore from November 4 to 5, 2009:

CONSIDERING

That quality scientific and technical health information is essential for health policy makers, healthcare providers and health researchers to develop, improve, and implement efficient and effective healthcare systems and services;

That inequitable access to quality health information could result in poor health planning and healthcare delivery which adversely affect the health conditions of the public;

That surmounting this inequity requires public - private partnerships to facilitate equitable access to both production and consumption of health information for all;

That the Western Pacific Region Index Medicus (WPRIM), the Global Health Library (GHL), and the Asia Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors (APAME) are important collaborative initiatives which are vital instruments to ensure the global accessibility and dissemination of quality health information in the Western Pacific Region;

CONFIRM

Our commitment to free and universal dissemination and access to quality health information through the WPRIM and the GHL;

Our commitment to pursue the goals and objectives of APAME by further building networks, convening conferences, and organizing events to educate and empower editors, peer reviewers and authors in generating quality scientific and technical publications;

CALL ON

Member States of the Western Pacific Region, in collaboration with stakeholders from the private sector, to formulate and implement policies that endorse free and equitable access to quality health information;

Stakeholders from the public and private sectors, national and international organizations, to support WPRIM and the GHL in order to ensure the free and global accessibility of health research done in the Western Pacific Region;

Governments, the private sector and other editors' associations to support APAME in implementing various activities, guidelines and practices that would improve the quality of scientific writing and publications in the Asia Pacific Region;

COMMIT

Ourselves to persevere in the pursuit of the WPRIM and GHL initiatives through APAME, by encouraging peer-to-peer relationships that will allow editors, editorial staff and librarians to maintain balance, work out ideas and provide mutual support;

Our organization, APAME, to building further networks, convening conferences, and organizing events to educate and empower editors, peer reviewers and authors to achieve and maintain internationally acceptable, but regionally realistic, scholarly standards.

November 6, 2009, Singapore
www.wpro.who.int/apame
apame@wpro.who.int

(This declaration was launched at the International Forum on Academic Medical Publishing held in conjunction with the Singapore Medical Journal Golden Jubilee Conference on November 6, 2009.)