



International Federation of  
Library Associations and Institutions

# Public Access to Health Information





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# What libraries can do to spread health information





# How libraries can help

- Libraries can help people get relevant information for various purposes:
  - To help them with **avoidance** of the causes of ill-health through knowledge
  - To help them take advantage of **prevention** programmes such as immunisation
  - To help them get the best **treatment** for health problems.



# Libraries have a great deal to offer

- Skills
  - Skills that librarians have (acquiring, organising and presenting information)
  - Skills that librarians can teach – Information Literacy
- Materials
  - Health information corners for the public
  - Bibliographies and documents for doctors and researchers
- Premises
  - For meetings
  - Publicity through posters and events





# Some possible activities

- The slides which follow suggest some activities that would help spread health information
- These may not fit the needs of your community or may not be possible for some reason.
- What would you suggest as alternatives or modifications of these?





# The library as a community health focal point

- The library is a potential community focal point, which can help extend the community activities of clinics and aid projects
- Regular visits from community health workers, nurses, doctors, NGO project workers can be organised.
- The library may not have much space inside, but when the weather is suitable, activities can be held outside.





# Library health information corners

- Libraries can collect the leaflets, manuals and other materials created by government agencies and NGOs.
- These materials are free, but often some work is necessary to obtain them.
- The library can make them available for users to take away (or consult in the library if there is only one copy).
- A special health information corner is one way to do this, but is it definitely the best way?



# Learning groups and clubs

- The library can organise activity and learning groups (especially for children).
- Librarians can lead such groups, using posters and other materials for learning purposes
- Visits by nurses, project workers etc. can form part of the group's programme
- Showing of films or videos is useful, if possible.







# Librarians outside the library

- Librarians can promote health information by visits to venues such as:
  - Schools
  - Churches, and other meeting places such as
  - Markets
  - Bus and railway stations
- Librarians can organise publicity in local newspapers and radio stations
- Libraries need to be represented at community and development project meetings.





# Information literacy activities

- People need help in understanding
  - Health information pamphlets and brochures
  - Prescriptions and doctor's instructions
  - Publicity materials such as posters.
- Librarians can help individuals interpret information
- They can also work with groups to improve general information literacy
- There are some examples of materials that need interpretation in the following slides



# Interpreting information materials

- Look at the following materials imagining that you are an ordinary person, maybe not too well-educated.
  - Are the words and sentences used the ones that people will understand best?
  - Are the images attractive and interesting?
  - Are the images culturally appropriate?
  - Are the messages clear?
  - How do you think these posters could be improved?



# Extract from a poster

- You can STOP Cholera
  - Cholera is a dangerous disease caused by germs that make a patient to pass excessive watery diarrhoea, leading to death within 3 to 4 hours if not treated quickly.
- HOW TO PREVENT CHOLERA
  - Always use a toilet to dispose all faeces, including children's faeces. Ensure the toilet is clean all the time.





# Text of a poster

- Boys & Girls
- Learn your ABCD's
- It is very important to your health.
- Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms
- and don't use Drugs
- Having sex without a condom can give you AIDS.
- **Failing these tests may kill you!**
- Places where you can get advice and condoms are:
  - \* The Parish Priest
  - \* Nun
  - \* Local Store
  - \* Pharmacy
  - \* Hospital
  - \* STD Clinic



## **GIRLS ARE VERY VULNERABLE TO HIV INFECTION**



They need family support to  
protect themselves.

Protection from unwanted sex.

Protection from unsafe sex.

Teach them how to negotiate condom use.

Help them avoid unwanted sex and sexually  
transmitted infections.



# SHOULD WOMEN CARRY CONDOMS?

Some might say: “only those loose types of women carry condoms.”



So, you want me to trust a man when it comes to my health?

**BE SAFE** HIV/AIDS stays for life

**Keep condoms in your  
purse because you  
never know....**



# Information literacy - conclusions

- Providing health information to the community needs clear messages using effective language and images.
- Health information promoters surprisingly often get this wrong
- Librarians can help by:
  - Helping people interpret messages
  - Providing Information Literacy sessions
  - Getting involved in designing and producing clear messages.





# General Conclusions

- Libraries need a policy on Public Access to Health Information
- Partnerships need to be formed with health care and other organisations
- Information materials need to be acquired and developed
- Librarians should reach out beyond the walls of the library

