

Health workers in Tanzania benefit from open-access research thanks to INASP grant

Enriching patient care in remote communities

The improvement of health and prevention of disease has long been central to international development policies worldwide. The attainment of good health has been prioritized by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals as Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages. Part of making this a reality is ensuring that health professionals have access to the latest research and advancements in order to make informed medical decisions. If they are not able to access vital research information, patients will be put at risk and the health of communities will not improve. It is therefore crucial that health workers in developing countries are able to make use of the vast body of open-access literature that authors and health-research grant recipients make freely available online.

The problem is that many health workers in developing regions, particularly in rural communities, are unaware that open-access research exists – and many do not have the skills or tools needed to access this literature.



The Open Access for All (OA4A) project team after a Q&A session during the 2015 Open Access Week exhibition

Unfortunately, the inability to access research can lead to outdated skills, diagnoses and practices among health workers, leaving them unable to stop the spread of, or treat, preventable diseases and conditions in the community. Thus, the importance of raising awareness about open-access research, and devising solutions to barriers that prevent health workers from accessing it, cannot be overstated.

Tanzania Rural Health Movement (TRHM), based in Mwanza city, is one organization that is committed to training health

About TRHM

Launched in July 2011 by Dr Marko Hingi, Tanzania Rural Health Movement (TRHM) is a non-profit community-based organization with a mission to ensure excellence in the provision of health services in Tanzanian communities. Its primary goals are to spread health knowledge to rural communities and promote good health through medical services, research and publications, together with related environmental conservation activities.





Group photo after launching the OA4A project in 2014

workers in rural communities to use online research literature. Alongside activities like outreach programmes for street children and online counselling for family planning, TRHM conducts advocacy work among rural health practitioners and medical students about open-access research.

“If people do not know about the resources that are available to them, they will not access them,” states Dr Marko Hingi, founder and executive director of TRHM. “We need to raise awareness about these resources and point health workers in the direction of the free

online journals that will help them develop their knowledge and apply it to caring for their patients.”

Promoting open-access research

INASP has supported TRHM to raise awareness of open-access research through an annual competition it runs with UNESCO. Coinciding with Open Access Week, the competition invites institutions and organizations to apply for funding for various activities during the week. In 2014 and 2015, TRHM received a small grant from INASP. Together

with funding from the Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences-Bugando (CUHAS), the money has enabled Hingi and the team to promote and deliver their Open Access for All (OA4A) project.

Long-term benefits of Open Access Week

TRHM’s OA4A project has been enormously successful at spreading knowledge about open-access research among rural health practitioners and medical students at CUHAS. In the words of Irundede Luchius, a second year medical student at the university,

“Better access to online research helps with understanding different health issues, such as safer sex, contraceptives and screening for diseases. It improves women’s health status, reduces unplanned pregnancies and thus improves health in rural communities in general.”

Irundede Luchius, second year medical student at CUHAS and volunteer at TRHM



About Open Access Week

Open Access Week is an annual global event celebrating its eighth year. Held in October, it provides opportunities for academic communities throughout the world to discover the benefits of open-access research, share their knowledge with colleagues and cement the position of open-access literature as a new norm in scholarship and research.

The INASP/UNESCO Open Access Week competition is an annual event supporting open-access activities and celebrating Open Access Week. There are 10 prizes of \$500 available to help support Open Access Week activities in developing and emerging countries.

To find out more about the competition, visit: www.inasp.info/open-access-competition.

the activities during Open Access Week helped her “gain awareness about different research” and showed her “how to access this research easily”, which she reports has had a positive impact on her career.

Importantly, the impact of OA4A has been far-reaching, extending beyond the immediate benefits reaped by those who attended the workshops and visited the exhibition. Raising awareness about open-access research, and training students and health workers to access relevant online literature, were simply the first steps towards improving health



Closing remarks from Marko Hingi after the 2014 panel presentation and discussion

services in the community. From there, health workers have been able to apply the knowledge they learnt about clinical best practices to aid their day-to-day practice and diagnosis.

Deeper and more up-to-date medical knowledge can also help combat serious global health threats in rural communities. For example, antibiotic resistance – a worldwide challenge that is particularly pressing in developing countries – increases when medical personnel dispense drugs without proper knowledge. “Reading the relevant scientific literature gives our health workers a better understanding of the available drugs,” Hingi points out. “Using the knowledge they acquire, they can select the best drugs with which to treat their patients.”

Ultimately, when doctors and health workers make decisions that are informed by the latest research, patient care drastically improves and health in the wider community is elevated. The stock of medical information that is freely available online is a vital

“I didn’t know that I could access online resources for free ... I now hope I can use my smartphone to do wonders in my clinical practice.”

**Dr John,
participant in
Open Access Week
activities**





Access through INASP

Open access is not the only way for researchers and others in countries like Tanzania to access research information. For more than two decades INASP has been working with more than 50 academic publishers to negotiate free and low-cost access to information for national library consortia. For more information about materials available in Tanzania, see: www.inasp.info/en/network/country/tz.

Project Director Marko Hingi introduces the new t-shirt for the 2015 OA4A project

resource for accelerating health outcomes in remote locations, leading to key developmental and economic advances at the national level.

Activities

In terms of promotion, the INASP/ UNESCO grants allowed TRHM to create banners and posters – both online and in the CUHAS compound – and contributed to transport costs for outreach activities. In terms of the events, the grants helped towards the cost of hiring venues and providing participants with teaching materials and refreshments.

More specifically, in 2014 the INASP/UNESCO grant financed a workshop with five rural health workers and a group of medical students from CUHAS. With the funds, TRHM was able to buy stationery, notebooks, pens and a printer, as well as t-shirts for the volunteers to encourage recognition and spark conversations at the university. In 2015, TRHM used the grant to hold an exhibition about open-access research on the CUHAS compound.

“The best thing about Open Access Week is raising awareness,” says Hingi. “Even though we

have facilities and resources, so many people don’t have enough knowledge about them. Many students came to us with questions – and it felt great to be really useful to people and teach them something important that they didn’t know before.”

Buoyed by the success of OA4A, TRHM is already making plans to build on its activities. Hingi is keen to hold more open-access exhibitions throughout the year, and he aspires to see the establishment of internet cafés within each district hospital where health workers can go to access research and knowledge.

“It is our responsibility to provide proper care to our patients – but to do this, we need knowledge and understanding.”

Dr Marko Hingi, founder and executive director of TRHM