

# Information and communication: a library's local response to HIV/AIDS in Zambia

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## Abstract

*Objective:* To document and describe the University of Zambia Medical library's responses to the fight against HIV/AIDS in Zambia.

*Methods:* The methodology adopted was a case study approach combined with an analysis of the literature such as annual reports and official documents. This was augmented by personal reflections of the author having worked at the Medical Library.

*Results:* The University of Zambia Medical library has over the years instituted and implemented HIV/AIDS information provision programmes that include the provision of information in various formats – print or electronic and, in addition, capacity building in HIV/AIDS information literacy skills.

*Conclusion:* A library's social responsibility calls for it to be part of national responses to crises that arise in society. As HIV/AIDS has affected every aspect of Zambian society prevention, treatment, care and support there is an understanding that the library's role should be using the critical and strategic resource at its disposal – information – as part of their contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS. In this context, libraries should source, collect, organize and disseminate information on HIV/AIDS in a way that is easily accessible to researchers, HIV/AIDS programme implementation agencies and the ordinary public.

## Key Messages

### Implications for Practice

- Utilize available opportunities and spaces to provide HIV/AIDS information.
- Maximize on the economies of scale by working in collaboration and partnership with others to facilitate access to HIV/AIDS information.
- Adopt a multi-pronged approach in information acquisition and delivery including the use of freely available HIV/AIDS information resources.

### Implications for Policy

- Improve ICT Infrastructure in the country.
- Develop collaboration and partnership guidelines for libraries.
- Innovative LIS curricula that is responsive to everyday user needs.
- Develop Library Policies on HIV/AIDS information dissemination.

## Introduction

The University of Zambia (UNZA) Medical Library's primary role is to serve 'not only the staff and students of the School of Medicine, but also the senior medical and para-medical staff at

the hospital'.<sup>1</sup> The UNZA medical library, part of the UNZA library system, has the largest collection of biomedical literature in the country. As a result the University library system has been designated the national reference library; its services extend to members of the public and all health workers countrywide.

It holds over 10 000 books and 290 periodical titles, either directly purchased or funded through

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various donated programmes.<sup>1</sup> The library also benefits from current information access initiatives such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) Access to Research Initiative (HINARI)<sup>2</sup> and the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI).<sup>3</sup> These two programmes facilitate access to current full-text electronic biomedical literature for researchers and scientists in the developing world.

### HIV/AIDS in Zambia

HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are among the leading causes of death in Zambia. According to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey of 2007, HIV/AIDS levels were estimated at 14.3% of the adult population between the ages of 15 and 49 years (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup> However, the urban HIV/AIDS prevalence rates were estimated at 19.7% as opposed to the rural areas of 10.3%. In the Zambia Sexual Behaviour Survey of 2005, the major health problems seen were malaria at 92.5%

and AIDS at 58.1%. In the same survey, 18% of children under the age of 15 years were orphans, 22% in the urban areas and 16% in the rural areas had lost one or both parents, whilst 4% of the children were dual orphans.<sup>5</sup> The HIV/AIDS pandemic has been compounded by high levels of poverty. It has also been worsened by the lack of access to adequate healthcare by the majority of the population. Tuberculosis is another major public health problem with the highest notification of recorded cases since 1981 being in 2004 with over 58 000 cases.<sup>6</sup> Malaria currently accounts for nearly four million clinically diagnosed cases per year, 36% of hospitalizations and out-patient department visits, and from one previous study at the University Teaching Hospital, up to 20% of maternal mortality.<sup>7</sup>

### Objectives

To document, review and analyse the UNZA Medical Library's responses to the fight against HIV/AIDS in Zambia.

**Table 1** HIV prevalence by socioeconomic characteristics

	Women	Number	Men	Number	Total	Number
<b>Age</b>						
15–19	5.7	1202	3.6	1162	4.7	2365
20–24	11.8	1023	5.2	865	8.7	1888
25–29	19.9	1058	11.4	796	16.3	1854
30–34	26.0	819	17.1	787	21.6	1607
35–39	24.9	586	22.4	608	23.6	1194
40–44	18.3	445	24.1	410	21.1	855
45–49	12.1	369	18.6	313	15.1	682
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	23.1	2317	15.9	2148	19.7	4464
Rural	11.0	3185	9.4	2795	10.3	5980
<b>Province</b>						
Central	22.0	507	12	458	17.5	965
Copperbelt	21.6	973	12.3	949	17.0	1922
Eastern	11.0	748	9.5	654	10.3	1402
Luapula	11.5	408	15.3	317	13.2	726
Lusaka	22.4	902	19	878	20.8	1780
Northern	7.7	744	5.7	662	6.8	1406
North-western	9.1	281	4.5	251	6.9	532
Southern	15.8	560	13.2	513	14.5	1073
Western	16.1	379	13.9	260	15.2	638
Total	16.2	5502	12.3	4942	14.2	10 444

Percentage (%) of HIV positive among interviewed women aged 15–49 years and men aged 15–59 years who were tested, by background characteristics, Zambia 2007. Central Statistics Office of Zambia, 2007 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS), Central Statistics of Zambia, Lusaka, 2008.

## Research method and techniques

The researcher approached the data collection in several ways. First, data were collected from official documents, unpublished and published university documents, annual reports, ordinary reports and university calendars. In addition, reports from the Ministry of Health and the Central Statistics Office of Zambia and other related literature were consulted.

## Data analysis, results and discussion

A combined approach of analysing the results with the discussion was adopted. This method involved an analysis of the literature. It was augmented by personal reflections of the author.

## Results and analysis

### Users of the HIV/AIDS information

Users of the library came from a spectrum of Zambian society: students, researchers and all categories of health staff, Medical Doctors, Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, Nurses, Clinical Officers, Environmental Health Technicians and other public health specialists. Other users include people from government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In order to cater for different user groups the library has had to combine various dissemination methods. The content on HIV/AIDS also needs to be targeted at different levels.

### HIV/AIDS information resources at the medical library

The library manages over 20 journal titles on HIV/AIDS. As the library has not had any journal subscriptions since the mid 1980s, these resources are donated.<sup>8</sup> The titles range from the technical ones like AIDS meant for researchers, whilst others are meant for people managing HIV/AIDS programmes, working either in NGOs or government agencies; on programmes of prevention, care and treatment. These publications have not only provided current and relevant information on HIV/AIDS to library users, but also innovative programmes on HIV/AIDS prevention and management.

The majority of publications, especially the ones that are of a programmatic nature were donated to the library in bulk. Once they arrived in the library, they were immediately distributed to other organizations for use in their work, leaving only one or two copies in the library. The organizations targeted were the HIV/AIDS Resource Centres, several government health-related institutions and NGOs working in the health sector. This process has enabled the library to create relationships and partnerships with several key players in the HIV/AIDS sector in the country.

### Partnerships and collaboration in HIV/AIDS information provision

The UNZA Medical Library interacts with health practitioners and other library users through lending books, journals and non-book materials such as CD-ROMs, videos and DVDs. Working in partnerships with other organizations in the provision of HIV/AIDS information is an essential component in the response to HIV/AIDS. In trying to improve the sourcing of and access to health information, the library has worked with different partners like the Dreyfus Health Foundation (DHF) of New York, USA; the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) of the Netherlands, the University of Florida (UF) Health Sciences Centre Library, the US National Library of Medicine (NLM) and the WHO amongst many others. This assistance has come in different forms:

- support towards training of library staff
- acquisition of equipment
- joint project activities.

Under the various collaborative partnerships, the Library has developed programmes of health information dissemination, targeting both institution-based users and those from outside the institution, specifically those in rural areas.

One such programme was the Communication for Better Health (CBH) project, implemented with the support of DHF, involving the production of the Zambia Health Information Digest. This repackaged information in booklet format contained health news and announcements from national and international sources, in addition to MEDLINE abstracts. Readers could also request free full-text articles obtained through a twinning programme with the UF Health Centre Library. It was distributed to all 1200 health institutions and

health practitioners in the country who did not have easy access to current medical literature. The total print run was 2000. The remaining digests were distributed to other agencies within the country. It was a way of reaching health practitioners with no access to libraries or the Internet. To those with Internet access, the digest was simultaneously published online. Among the subject areas that the readers constantly asked for: was more information on HIV/AIDS. This is a reflection on the disease priority areas existing in the country.

Other Internet-based programmes such as Health-L list, was essentially set up by the Library with the assistance from KIT as a social communication tool for HIV/AIDS information to Health workers in Zambia. Later driven in part by the demand from health professionals and health practitioners, and also because of the absence of any available information channels the subject area was broadened. To the benefit of members. Through this channel, health practitioners and the community had mutual responsibility of sharing and exchanging information on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

#### Website on HIV/AIDS information in Zambia

Although there is plenty of health information on the Internet, it is scattered and difficult to access. There was a need to organize Zambian HIV/AIDS information in a systematic manner. Thus, the library with the assistance of Dr Lenny Rhine, from UF Health Sciences Centre Library, created a website called AIDS in Zambia with access points for local HIV/AIDS information. On the website there were links to:

- an AIDS Bibliography in Zambia
- Newspaper Articles/Press releases dealing with Africa in General (March 2000 to 2006)
- Newspaper Articles/Press Releases on HIV/AIDS in Zambia (April 1997 to 2006).

This also provided links to other HIV/AIDS information resources. Figure 1 gives a screen shot of the AIDS in Zambia website.

#### Technical assistance in the management of HIV/AIDS information

The library has provided technical assistance, in the management and organization of information,

to organizations working in the HIV/AIDS sectors. As some of the organizations are relatively small and do not need the services of a full-time qualified librarian, they would identify a person within the organization responsible for managing the collection and assisting users to have access to the collection. Depending on the size of the collection, a simple collection management system is often proposed for the organization to use.

#### Capacity building HIV/AIDS information provision

For HIV/AIDS information provision to be effective, the library periodically carries out training on several levels. The first level targets the health practitioners, the second level of training is for the UNZA library staff and the third level is for staff from other institutions working in the HIV/AIDS field. The curriculum for the training is tailored to the needs of the trainees. Sometimes it becomes necessary to combine the groups, having health practitioners and library and information workers together. This format of training has its advantages and disadvantages. The most obvious advantage of mixing the group is that the training format allows the two groups to learn from each other; the users of the HIV/AIDS information and the people that are responsible for collecting, organizing, preserving and disseminating that information. On the other hand, the training model sometimes creates an atmosphere where one group is more dominant and does not allow the other party to contribute effectively, especially if they are shy. What is required when such a situation arises is a skilled and qualified facilitator who can guide the training process in a manner that will lead to the desired learning goal.

While the curriculum for the two groups is sometimes similar, slight modifications are needed. For example, the library in partnership with other organizations organized an HIV/AIDS information workshop in Lusaka, Zambia, in June of 2006. This workshop was facilitated by Dr Lenny Rhine, with other local facilitators. The objectives were to train key 'health information workers' from HIV/AIDS resource centres to:

- identify, evaluate and utilize current HIV/AIDS information including Internet-based material;

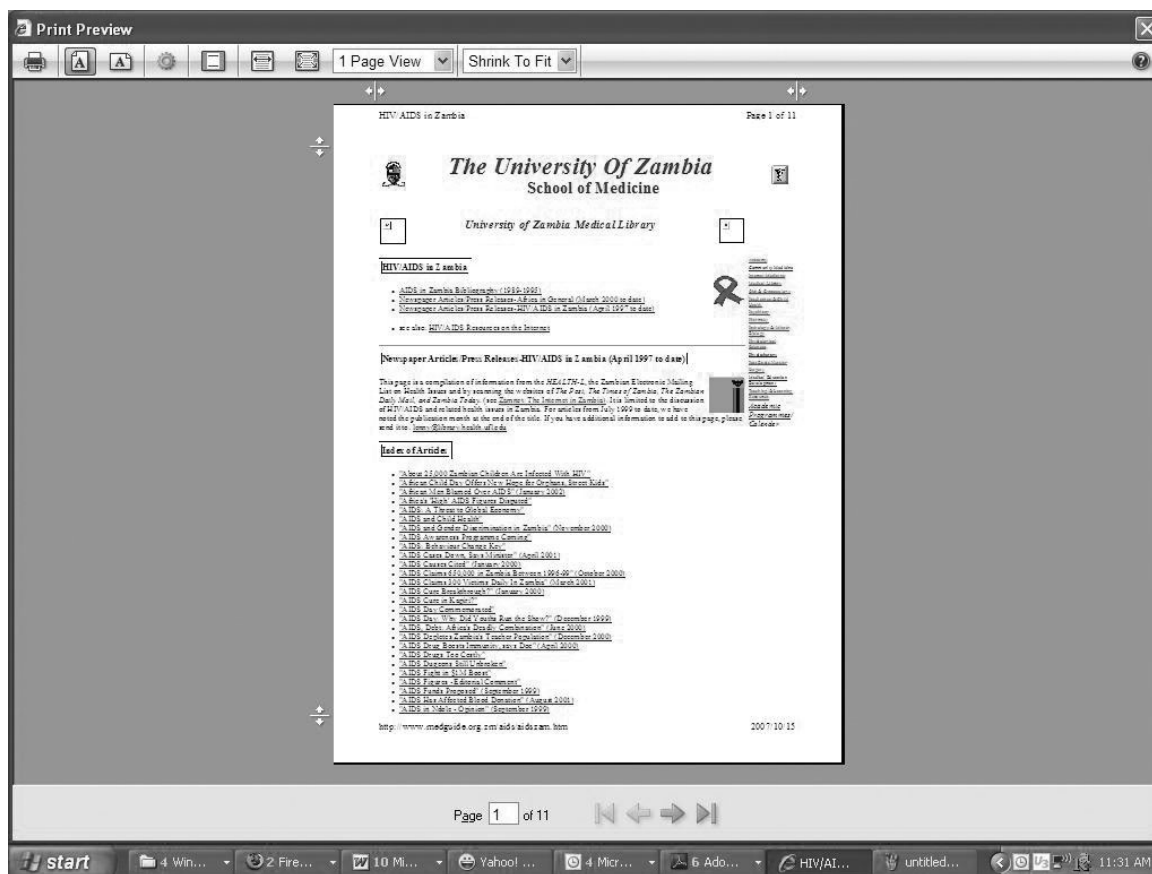


Figure 1 AIDs in Zambia webpage. Source: <http://www.medguide.org.zm/aids/aidszam.htm>

- learn how to market and distribute HIV/AIDS information to health workers, patients, and interested community groups;
- understand the role of health information workers in the HIV/AIDS information delivery process;
- facilitate communication and collaboration between the various HIV/AIDS resource centres;
- discuss ongoing HIV/AIDS information needs and the development of national programmes.

On the other hand, workshop organized in partnership with Lukulu District Health Management Team (DHMT), the UNZA Medical Library and KIT in 2002 had a totally different focus. The Lukulu DHMT, a rural district in western Zambia with a population of 68 375,5 is responsible for the management of healthcare delivery in Lukulu district on behalf of the Zambian Government. This workshop put emphasis on the needs of the training participants, bringing together health practitioners and health managers so that they could

share and exchange views on 'Access to Health Related Information in Lukulu District, with a special focus on HIV/AIDS'. The principal objectives of the workshop were to:

- identify existing public health information needs, particularly in the field of HIV/AIDS;
- develop a district health information policy plan, specifying priority strategies and mechanisms for developing appropriate information systems, specifically in the field of HIV/AIDS;
- identify the role of information systems in the wider context of other public health strategies and interventions, and ensure their integration in overall district health policies and actions;
- understand and locate HIV/AIDS information not just in a health framework but in a broader social, cultural, economic and political context.

The expected outcomes of the workshop were that a clear insight into the local health information needs in terms of HIV/AIDS would be understood by all stakeholders. The stakeholders were

encouraged to identify sources of information and when these would be appropriate. They were also expected to understand the processes involved in accessing information and identifying the target audience, for dissemination. It was the aim of the workshop that when the people who are involved in the work of the District AIDS Task Force in Lukulu District did their annual planning, information would become a critical resource to take into consideration, so that it informs their policy formulation and implementation processes.

#### The UNZA Medical library's role in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Zambia

The UNZA Medical library's role in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic has been a proactive response to the information needs of the researcher, student, implementation agencies and the public. Indeed other authors have found libraries to have played a critical role in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information. Gosh and Bhatt<sup>9</sup> in their paper have provided a brief review of the literature that links libraries and HIV/AIDS information. In their review, the authors highlight the fact that librarians can be both advocates and educators in disseminating HIV/AIDS information. Ghosh suggests some possible roles for information professionals:

- to be advocates and educators in AIDS information dissemination
- to collaborate with non-governmental organizations in packaging health information
- to help researchers publicize their research output to the local community
- to promote HIV/AIDS information that they have access to
- to collaborate between librarians and community health workers and outside agencies to mobilize and educate community members
- to distribute notices and flyers to notice boards and library circulation desks
- to repackage information for health workers
- to acquire special collections to keep people informed of new developments.<sup>10</sup>

Importantly libraries can take advantage of information and communication technologies (ICT) to provide and package content that is user friendly. Chikonzo, recognizing the importance of

ICTs in disseminating HIV/AIDS information, argues that it can be a 'powerful tool in providing information supporting the response to HIV/AIDS'.<sup>11</sup> Sturges in his paper on public libraries in Africa reported that the Kenya National Library Services had 'an AIDS awareness project that repackages and translates information from foreign sources'.<sup>12</sup>

The UNZA medical library's role of disseminating HIV/AIDS has been carried out at several levels; first, through efficient sourcing and organization of both local and international information materials on HIV/AIDS information. This information has been contained in various formats such as print or electronic; journals, books, posters, pamphlets, videos, DVDs or films. Critically and crucially, the creation of databases on local HIV/AIDS information has enabled the library to share important HIV/AIDS information emanating from researchers within the country. However, it was clear from the outset that the format of the information was not going to determine who the library served, but rather the needs of the community. In a sense the users determined the information and the format to be utilized. For a condition such as HIV/AIDS, it is vitally important that librarians supply users with information from different sources. O'Grady suggests that 'many health care information seekers, including those with HIV/AIDS, are using various sources to find and discuss treatment content'.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, to be effective, information had to be disseminated through appropriate channels to reach the target audience. In a similar vein, Nwagwu identified 14 different sources of HIV/AIDS information, which provided the community with information, ranging from radio, television, newspapers, pamphlets/magazine and sources such as clinical health workers, places of worship, school, community meetings, friends/relatives, workplace, cinema, exhibition, adult education programmes and political leaders.<sup>14</sup> Most importantly it is an opportunity for libraries to interact with users in different environments and therefore promote the library's community social engagement.

Second, the library devised and combined various dissemination methods that were appropriate for the user. Methods employed included among others reference services, inter-library loans, lending of

books, journals and other non-book materials, electronic information resources, e-mail discussion lists, repackaging of information, selective dissemination of information and creation of databases especially grey literature information on HIV/AIDS information on Zambia. In Kenya, the Kenya National Library Service used various methods to reach their users; innovative methods such as book box services to student groups using bicycles as well offering AIDS information service to the nomadic people in the Garissa district.<sup>12</sup> Batambuze, citing the Uganda National Commission for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported in his paper at the Berlin International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) conference that the Uganda National Library has been making HIV/AIDS information accessible to the community. This has been done through the Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Telecentre where a 'collection of books, brochures, posters, CD-ROMs, videos and audiocassettes, in the local language on HIV/AIDS'<sup>15</sup> have been provided to the community.

Third, the library has formed partnerships and collaboration in HIV/AIDS information provision. The library has been able to work with various agencies such as the WHO, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); NGOs such as Afya Mzuri, Kara Counselling, Family Health Trust and Zambia National Aids Network (ZNAV), government agencies as well as the Ministry of Health and the Central Statistics Office. Internationally, the library has collaborated with organizations such as KIT, DHF, UF Health Sciences Centre Library and the Southern African HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service. Working with partners such as the National Aids Council of Zambia, District and Provincial Aids Task Forces ensures that information sources are used, even in the rural areas where the library has no physical presence. The importance of libraries working in partnership with other organizations in the provision of HIV/AIDS information has been recognized by Perry who argues that in 'building collaborations with community based organizations, public libraries can become common ground for providing proactive prevention-focused information services'.<sup>16</sup> Cultivating and developing organizational collaboration was also identified at

a conference titled 'Confronting the challenges of HIV/AIDS information dissemination'<sup>17</sup> held at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2003. The report by the former United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (US NCLIS) makes a strong recommendation regarding the roles of libraries in partnerships; 'libraries' role in disseminating HIV/AIDS information is strongest when they establish partnerships with other organizations already involved in dissemination and education activities'.<sup>18</sup> Albright and Kawooya<sup>19</sup> have argued that partnerships and collaboration in HIV/AIDS information provision extends to Library and Information Science (LIS) educational institutions. LIS training is critical for librarians so that they are aware of

- too much information worldwide
- little access within African institutions
- limited budgets
- multiple languages
- inadequate ICT
- diversity of users
- limited staff
- appropriate curriculum.

A library response to HIV/AIDS requires a multi-faceted approach and therefore the library has been working in collaboration with other local institutions in Zambia in the setting up and formation of the Zambia Association of Resource Centres (ZARCH) on HIV/AIDS. ZARCH's objectives are to:

- establish and maintain an association for persons and organizations concerned with HIV and AIDS libraries, resource centres and information work in Zambia;
- encourage cooperation between libraries, information and resource centres dealing with HIV and AIDS;
- provide a forum for support, information sharing, skills sharing and capacity building among those responsible for developing and maintaining libraries, information and resource centres dealing with HIV and AIDS;
- facilitate and ensure a systematic approach to the collection and organization of HIV and AIDS information within Zambia;
- facilitate the dissemination of HIV and AIDS information across Zambia;
- identify gaps in the availability and provision of HIV and AIDS information in Zambia;

- lobby organizations for the production of relevant materials, and to collaborate in sourcing materials with the aim of reducing unity costs to each individual organization;
- undertake other such activities as thought necessary by the membership conducive to the attainment of the objectives.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most successful projects of the association's work has been the initiation and publication of the book *Where to Find Information on HIV/AIDS*. The book is now in its second edition and is a valuable aid, assisting in the identification and location of information resources and organizations working in the HIV/AIDS sector countrywide. Through the association, the Library has worked with various institutions in the identification, acquisition and sharing of HIV/AIDS information resources, whether in print or electronic. This is done in the monthly meetings of ZARCH.

#### Importance of information and communication in responding to HIV/AIDS

In order to further better health in Zambia, the Library has, over the years, developed and implemented health information provision and dissemination projects in support of HIV/AIDS prevention efforts in the country. The library has a social responsibility to provide HIV/AIDS information. In a country where there are high levels of HIV/AIDS infection and mortality rates, the library has to join all other members of society in fighting the pandemic. In doing this the library has used information as its resource. It is in this light that the UNZA Medical Library's response to HIV/AIDS prevention was tackled at two levels: on one level information support to the health practitioners and on the other level information support to the public.

Due to the nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, there is a huge interest in terms of research on all aspects of the condition from research institutions and universities. There is also tremendous activity from governments, multi-lateral organizations, NGOs and Civil Society. The end result has been a wealth of information on research, programme management and treatment aspects of HIV/AIDS scattered all over the country. Information obtained from conference/workshop reports and presentations are also relevant and there is a need to find ways of tapping

into this so that information is shared in the country whether in print or electronic format.

Libraries can play a major role in the information and communication of HIV/AIDS information. As advocated by Forman:

'effective communication of valid and appropriate information is the specific remedy for infection rates attributable to a lack of information, and for many of the social ills associated with misinformation and myths around the epidemic. Information can confer the capacity to act appropriately, whether by protecting oneself from infection or taking steps to influence decision makers. Information is the source of considerable personal and social power, with the capacity to shift some of the power differentials at the heart of the epidemic'.<sup>21</sup>

#### Constraints to HIV/AIDS information provision

One of the major constraints that the library has in providing HIV/AIDS information has been inadequate financial resources. A resultant effect has been the inability to purchase appropriate, relevant information resources suitable for the intended audience. However, when faced with this reality, the library has to resort to alternative funding.<sup>8</sup> More often it has tended to rely on freely available health literature. What is critical is ensuring that the library selects and evaluates each information resource gathered to ensure it fulfils the needs of the people in Zambia.

Inadequate ICT facilities countrywide has made it difficult for the library to take advantage of technological tools in the delivery of current HIV/AIDS information.<sup>22</sup> It is important for the library to work in improving their ICT facilities in partnership with other institutions.

#### Conclusion

As part of their contribution to the fight against this HIV/AIDS pandemic, libraries are being challenged to constantly define and refine their approach to information provision as part of their contribution to the fight against the pandemic. This requires that the medical library identifies its strengths and maximizes these with those of other institutions. The lessons learnt from what other libraries are doing nationally, regionally and worldwide can then be

adapted locally as best practices in HIV/AIDS information provision. Of paramount importance is the fact that, even in times of financial difficulties, there are alternatives that can be used by libraries to provide HIV/AIDS information without requiring huge sums of money. As IFLA has emphasized 'providing and disseminating information is what librarians throughout the world are good at. Librarians can thus make a difference in fighting the pandemic by taking a lead role at the community level to spread life saving information'.<sup>23</sup>

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