

VIRTUAL HEALTH LIBRARY
JAMAICA PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of Virtual Health Library VHL was initiated by the Latin American and Caribbean System on Health Science Information System guided by its coordinating Center [BIREME](#) in Brazil and the Pan American Health Organization. A declaration towards the VHL was made at the IV Pan American Congress on Health Information held in San Jose, Costa Rica in March 1998.

Recognizing the importance of wide access to information in strengthening and sustaining health care systems in the region, participating centers of the Network agreed to work towards the realization of VHL at national level, based on the guidelines provided at the above meeting. BIREME had undertaken the responsibility of preparing the necessary technological tools compatible with international standards and capable of handling quality information with the primary objective of providing access to these pools of resources via Internet without restrictions. BIREME over a period of time has developed methodologies for [Health Science Research Communication](#) that encompass bibliographic databases ([LILACS](#)), electronic publishing module ([SciELO](#)) document delivery system ([SCAD](#)) and continue to develop portals such as [health information locator](#) for information delivery.

The Medical Library of the University of the West Indies has been the Caribbean Coordinating Center for the BIREME Network since 1987. [MEDCARIB](#), the bibliographic database on medical information in the Caribbean is one of the products compiled by the Medical Library in collaboration with other English Speaking Caribbean countries of the Network. While MEDCARIB forms an integral part of proposed concept of VHL, the Medical Library now undertakes the responsibility of coordinating [VHL Jamaica](#).

OBJECTIVES OF VHL

To function efficiently and effectively, health care systems require reliable, up-to-date information with easy access where and when needed and the requirements in the Latin America and the Caribbean are not an exception. BIREME Network has recognized the need to expand the information resources beyond bibliographic databases and the need to provide universal access to quality information for researchers, educators and decision-makers and practitioners throughout the health care systems. The objective of VHL is to fulfill this need in the region using a cooperative approach with collaborative input.

VHL envisages that health science information generated in each country within the region be identified within a framework of quality control guidelines, entered, organized, and stored in an electronic format and made accessible without limitations via Internet. This will encompass bibliographic and factual databases, directories of institutions and personnel, numerical data, and electronic versions of journals, conferences papers, theses and other technical information, news, lists of discussion groups and information services such as Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI).

VHL AT COUNTRY LEVEL

VHL exists in a virtual space on the Internet and consists of collections or networks of health information sources in the country. Information sources are generated, updated, stored and manipulated on the Internet by producers; integrators and intermediaries in a `decentralized' manner using common methodologies for the integration of other VHLs for the region and can thus become freely available to potential users.

The `decentralized' nature of the VHL permits not only each country in the region, but also various health organizations within a country to be part of VHL representing their own organization and engage in VHL activities based on their capacities, enthusiasm and willingness. The visibility of VHL units is to be achieved through the presence of its own web-site with links to all such sites in the country and the region.

Increased awareness of VHL among the health authorities and institutions in the country as well as in the region and their political mobilization in its implementation is a prerequisite for the success of VHL. The authorities must ensure that information initiatives and resources are directed towards VHL on a priority basis. Cooperation between the authorities and - leadership of PAHO is indispensable for making this mobilization a reality. While BIREME and PAHO act as the leading forces at the regional level in promoting and implementing VHL activities at country level, the initiation and successful implementation of VHL depends on the commitment of health authorities and institutions in each country.

It is for this reason that [*Guide for the Development of the Virtual Health Library*](#) strongly suggests the establishment of a National Advisory Committee on VHL in each participating country together with a working party to ensure the implementation of VHL activities.

BENEFITS OF VHL TO CONTRIBUTING COUNTRIES

- Real time access to quality information resources within the organization, country, region and worldwide
- Integration of functions of publication, storage, preservation and indexing
- Quality Control of information
- Advantages of making use of multimedia and hypertext technologies
- Facilitates the establishment of institutional, national and regional policies and mechanisms for publishing organizing, maintaining and preservation of information products in electronic format
- Creation of a coherent, efficient platform for technical cooperation through the use of common methodologies and technologies that facilitate human resource development as well as improving information products and services
- Capacity to introduce and integrate various disciplines and specialties, (e.g. diabetes, sickle cell)
- Capacity to design and integrate various information products (e.g. lists of institutions, pharmaceuticals)

- Capacity to generate and integrate various technological tools such as computer software at no cost
- Capacity to integrate, organize and disseminate research, educational, management and statistical information resources
- Speedy updating of information sources
- An integrated mechanism for the evaluation and measurement of use and impact of information sources (journal impact factor by citation analysis)
- A Platform for the creation, development, adoption, acquisition and dissemination of information technologies suited to the different needs of the countries of the region that maximize their use
- Increased visibility of information inhibits duplication of efforts and highlights information gaps within countries and among countries of the region as well as outside the region
- An opportunity and a model to support the learning process in information technologies... from bibliographic databases to web-based information with hyperlinks and full texts
- An opportunity to facilitate and promote the transition between the old and new paradigms of information management in the region while permitting the coexistence of both systems
- Availability of information in other formats (CD, DVD) for users without Internet access
- A model that can be replicated and implemented in any specialized area of information

The Memorandum, which follows, sets out the responsibilities of the participating units, the stakeholders in VHL Project.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN PARTICIPATING CENTERS

This memorandum of understanding is made onin the year 2002 between the University of the West Indies, Pan American Health Organization/Jamaica, Ministry of Health and Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute, West Indian Medical Journal and the Medical Association of Jamaica to ensure the successful implementation of the Virtual Health Library Jamaica Project

1. PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM

- 1.1 To establish a framework for collaboration between institutions that is indispensable for the successful implementation of VHL Jamaica.
- 1.2 To establish an agreement on health information issues between producers, intermediaries and users of information by adopting the VHL model
- 1.3 To ensure that institutions at their highest level are committed to the implementation of this model
- 1.4 To ensure that an 'Advisory Committee' and a 'Working Party' are appointed to ensure the implementation of the Project

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The overall objective of this collaboration is to strengthen capabilities of capturing quality health information for recording, indexing, storing and dissemination
- 2.2 To initiate a health information system that operates as a 'one stop shop' for all information needs of the educators, researchers, administrators and practitioners in electronic format on the Internet
- 2.3 To provide a platform for all quality health information producing institutions within the country to make this information visible via Internet using a common methodology provided by BIREME

3. ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- 3.1 The Advisory Committee will be responsible for the following
 - a. Guiding the development of VHL
 - b. Coordinating cooperative activities and define priorities
 - c. Appointing criteria developed by the Working Party for selecting quality information sources for inclusion in the VHL
 - d. Promoting division of responsibilities in the cooperative operation of information sources

- e. Facilitating and authorizing the VHL space required for scientific and technical information
- f. Functioning as a publications board for the VHL
- g. Ensuring that a National Plan is submitted by the Coordinating Center as well as the participating units
- h. Monitoring the successful implementation of the Project
- i. Appointing an operational coordinator for the Project, from one of the institution that possesses the necessary capabilities (economic institutional, human resources and information technologies)
- j. Appointing a Working Party consisting of at least one member from each of the institutions within the Network and from other institutions as the VHL activities are increased and level of participation increased
- k. Facilitating the training in methodologies required by the members of the Working Party for the successful implementation of activities of the VHL. Meet a minimum of two times a year
- L. Evaluating the performance of the VHL as a whole

4. MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- 4.1 Members of the Advisory Committee are the directors/managers or his/her nominee of each institution and **should be powerful enough to make commitments and decisions** that are essential to carry out VHL activities successfully. Each member is responsible for the following
- a. Acting as the link between the VHL and the Institution
 - b. Ensuring that the institution makes a commitment to implement VHL and it provides necessary support and resources
 - c. Educating the high ranking officers on VHL
 - d. Proposing and establishing a publications policy and the flow of information within the institution to facilitates VHL activities
 - e. Nominating the member for the Working Party
 - f. Servicing as the institutional advisor to the Working Party member
 - g. Ensuring that VHL activities are included in the overall planning of the activities of the institution they represent

5. THE WORKING PARTY

- 5.1 The Working Party consists of the Coordinator and nominated members from organizations producing health information and is responsible for the following:
- a. Formulating a common pathway to achieve the objectives of VHL Jamaica
 - b. Encouraging complete participation by all members
 - c. Deciding on division of labour in cooperative activities
 - d. Discussing problem areas and make decisions for solutions
 - e. Promoting VHL activities
 - f. Promoting the use of VHL products

- g. Monitoring the progress of VHL Jamaica and review as needed
- h. Developing a publication policy for the approval of the Advisory Committee
- i. Defining and developing criteria for selecting quality information resources for the inclusion in VHL

6. MEMBERS OF THE WORKING PARTY

- 6.1 Members of the Working Party are the link between the institutions represented and the successful execution of VHL Jamaica and are responsible for the following:
- a. Preparing plans for VHL activities within the institution
 - b. Obtaining support from the parent organization for such plans
 - c. Implementing of plans in accordance with the agreement of the Working Party
 - d. Initiating and maintaining the web site
 - e. Reviewing progress and preparing progress reports
 - j. Seeking advise and the support from the institutional member of VHL Advisory Committee regarding internal problems within, hindering implementation of VHL activates within the institution

7. THE COORDINATOR

- 7.1 The Coordinator is the link between the Advisory Committee and the Working Party and is responsible for the following:
- a. Promoting effective operation of the Advisory Committee
 - b. Preparing national plans of action and ensure their successful implementation
 - c. Coordinating institutional plans
 - d. Facilitating implementation of plans submitted by each member
 - e. Discussing problems in implementation of plans and bring to the attention of the Advisory Committee for solutions when necessary
 - f. Investigating all possible areas of cooperation within the country, and initiating, encouraging and promoting the inclusion of these areas e.g. directories on information such as institutions
 - g. Inviting all possible institutions within the country to participate in the Programme and continue to expand VHL Jamaica
 - h. Providing other local institutions that produce health information the guidance in planning and training in implementing VHL concept
 - i. Organizing training sessions at national level as needed
 - j. Initiating and maintaining the VHL Jamaica web-site
 - k. Preparing progress reports and review
 - l. Preparing promotional material for national VHL
 - m. Promoting VHL activities and publicizing its products at national, regional and global levels
 - n. Acting as the Secretary for VHL Jamaica and organize regular meetings as well as occasional meetings as the need arises with the Advisory Committee as well as Working Party

8. PROCEDURE FOR SIGNING THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- 8.1 The memorandum of understanding should be signed by an authorized representative empowered to do so by the signatory organization
- 8.2 The representatives must be able to make an impact in the decision making process at Advisory Committee level
- 8.3 The Memorandum must be signed on the form provided
- 8.4 The full information including title and the function of the of the individual signatory, full address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address should be provided
- 8.5 The official organizational stamp, seal, or logo should also appear on the form
- 8.6 The signed sheet should be returned to:
 - VHL Jamaica Coordinator
 - Medical Library
 - University of the West Indies
 - Mona, Kingston
 - Jamaica, W.I.

Telephone: 876 - 927-1073
Fax: 876 - 970-0819

References:

2. About BIREME, <http://www.bireme.br>
3. About VHL <http://www.bireme.br/bvs/I/documentosBVS.htm>
4. 2001 Guide For the Development of the Virtual Health Library: Preliminary Version. <http://www.bireme.br>
5. Virtual Health Library._ BIREME/PAHO/WHO, Sao Palo, Brazil, 1998

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