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WHO DOCUMENTATION CENTRES: BUILDING AN INFORMATION NETWORK IN THE EUROPEAN REGION

Report on a WHO Meeting

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ABSTRACT

In 1989, the WHO Regional Office for Europe began to designate documentation centres to disseminate information on its activities as widely as possible. The second Meeting of Heads of WHO Documentation Centres took place in 1993, and was attended by representatives of 22 of the 25 centres of the European Region; the Meeting was held to recommend ways of improving cooperation in the network of centres, and to inform the participants about the work of the Regional Office and the relevant activities of WHO headquarters. The participants reviewed the progress made in carrying out the recommendations of the first meeting of the centres in 1990, and discussed three main issues: the role of a documentation centre, networking and outreach to target groups. The participants developed a questionnaire with which to secure information on the current facilities, services and standards of the centres. Finally, they made recommendations on the services that documentation centres should offer, the roles of the Regional Office and the centres in the network, the tasks that centres should address in the areas of translation and promotion, and the types of assistance that WHO should supply.

Keywords

DOCUMENTATION
INFORMATION CENTRES
INFORMATION SERVICES
EUROPE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the first WHO documentation centres were established to disseminate information on the activities of the WHO Regional Office for Europe as widely as possible. By the end of 1993, 25 libraries in 22 countries had become documentation centres; an additional 10 are expected to join the network by 1997.

The experience gained since 1989 by both the centres and the Regional Office formed the basis of the Meeting of Heads of WHO Documentation Centres; it was attended by 23 medical information specialists representing 22 WHO documentation centres, 3 observers, 4 staff members from WHO headquarters and 5 from the Regional Office for Europe. The meeting had two major purposes:

- to recommend ways of strengthening the network by improving cooperation between the centres, as well as that of the centres with the Regional Office; and

- to brief the participants on the work of the Regional Office and the relevant activities of WHO headquarters.

Ms Margaret Haines served as Chairperson and Ms Päivi Pekkarinen as Rapporteur. Annexes 1 and 4 list the working papers and background documents and the participants, respectively.

The first meeting of the documentation centres took place in Berlin from 12 to 15 November 1990. Its participants recommended a number of ways in which the centres and WHO could function more effectively, both individually and together (Annex 2). They focused on three major areas in which improvement was needed. Annex 3 lists the recommendations and indicates the progress that has been made in putting them into action. Additional work is needed, especially as new centres join the network, particularly those in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former USSR.

MAIN ISSUES

The participants addressed three main issues in plenary and subgroup discussions:

- the role of a documentation centre
- networking
- outreach to target groups.

Role and services

Although the documentation centres have had general objectives for several years, the goals to achieve them still need to be defined more clearly. A more systematic analysis of problems in individual countries and closer cooperation through networking would be helpful.

The participants considered that a questionnaire to collect information on the facilities, services and standards of the documentation centres would be helpful. A subgroup formed to develop this tool (Annex 3).

Current and retrospective information

Standardized bibliographic data are not considered necessary, as local conditions largely dictate the methods and formats used by centres. These range from card catalogues to computerized systems. In the long term, however, common standards would benefit all centres, as they would greatly facilitate networking and the exchange of information.

The WHOLIS and EURODOC databases are important tools, and centres lacking access to them are encouraged to establish the means to gain it. WHO headquarters and the Regional Office were urged to prepare a guide on how to use the databases. It would be useful for training staff, as well as helping clients of the centres.

Availability and delivery of material

At present, documentation centres are entitled to receive all Regional Office publications and (non-restricted) documents free of charge. While this has not been the policy of WHO headquarters,

the centres wish to receive headquarters publications free of charge. The participants recognized that this request would place a financial burden on WHO headquarters, and that the severe financial restrictions that have confronted WHO for a number of years make it impossible to provide free documentation and services to the extent that libraries and other institutions might envisage. The documentation centres offered to approach their national health authorities to make them more aware of the value of health information and the need for a more generous contribution to the WHO budget.

Delays in the delivery of material remain a problem. Faster delivery would help the documentation centres better to serve and inform their clients about WHO work. The designation of a focal point for requests in both the Regional Office and WHO headquarters would probably cut down the delays.

Translations and promotion

Very few centres have experience in translating or promoting the translation of publications and documents. The need for translations depends largely on local circumstances and the target groups concerned. Sometimes updated versions might be needed. In addition, inadequate resources for printing costs are a frequent problem.

The continuous dissemination of information about WHO documentation and activities to national audiences is a basic task of a documentation centre. The centres promote WHO documentation in various ways: through lists of new titles in newsletters, abstracts and reviews in professional journals, discussion of the documentation centre network at various meetings and dialogue with other libraries. Support from WHO in promotion, perhaps in the form of posters and videos, would be helpful.

Networking

At present, the documentation centre network is centralized, with the Regional Office as the hub. Direct exchange between the centres has been minimal, but such contact should increase as the network matures and as a result of the biennial meetings of the heads of the centres. A factor that helps to strengthen the links in the network is

the newsletter *Ex libris*, through which experience and information can be shared between meetings.

Outreach

The participants took no common view of the extent of outreach and the responsibilities of the documentation centres. Some favoured a broad approach to reach as many external users as possible, including the general public. Other participants used a much narrower approach, focusing on meeting the needs of particular groups of users.

Target groups vary greatly, depending on local circumstances. The staff of the host institutions, researchers, students and health professionals are usually considered prime target groups, however, with some attention paid to health administrators and social workers. The identification of target groups is a general problem, with which newly designated centres have an especially acute need for help; they have little experience with this new role. More statistics on the use of WHO materials are needed to plan systematically how to reach target groups. Common methods are needed to make comparable studies and statistics on users.

In addition, the efficient functioning of the centres requires monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the disseminated information. Some centres lack resources for this effort, and guidance from the Regional Office would be helpful.

Finally, publicity from the Regional Office and WHO headquarters about the documentation centres would help the centres to gain recognition from their national authorities, and thus facilitate their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Role and services

1. WHOLIS and EURODOC should be combined into one database to eliminate overlap and to facilitate use. Then the new WHOLIS should be sent on diskette to all documentation centres.

2. The Regional Office, in consultation with WHO headquarters, should make available the guide to WHOLIS, which includes information on using MICRO-ISIS.

3. WHOLIS should be made available to libraries other than the centres, throughout the participating countries over networks such as Internet, and an on-line ordering system over Internet (or other system) should be established.

4. With WHO headquarters, the Regional Office, should investigate the feasibility of providing the documentation centres with the WHOTERM database on diskette or CD-ROM as required. In addition, all documentation centres should receive the health for all database on Windows if required. The database should be produced on MS-DOS and made available upon request.

5. Documentation centres should obtain all WHO publications free of charge if required. Some centres would find it useful to obtain publications and documents in several languages and in greater quantity. As appropriate, WHO should try to meet these needs.

6. WHO should examine methods of making the full text of its publications available on CD-ROM or optical discs or over Internet file transfer.

7. To facilitate the retrieval of documentation, WHO should add a keyword and title index to its printed sales catalogues, and

WHO documents should contain full cataloguing in publication (CIP) data and International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs).

8. As the Regional Office has done, WHO headquarters should give general consent to copy all documents without prior approval.

9. WHO documents should have a clearly designated shelf-life, or period of expected usefulness. A document that replaces a previous one should be clearly indicated.

10. To increase the speed of the delivery of ordered material, WHO headquarters and the Regional Office should each designate a staff member to coordinate and facilitate dispatch.

11. All documentation centres should make WHO material available free of charge as reference material for the public. Other libraries should have access to the collection through the interlibrary loan network.

12. The Regional Office should advise and support the documentation centres that have experienced production and resource problems with translations of WHO material. Both the Regional Office and WHO headquarters should inform the centres of individuals and institutions making translations in their countries.

13. WHO headquarters should try to improve the dissemination of priced publications to target groups by national sales agents.

14. Documentation centres should supply the Regional Office with the names of journals, in their countries and elsewhere, that can review WHO publications and documents. They should also publicize their activities in library and public health journals through articles, news items about WHO and lists of selected new WHO publications.

15. Documentation centres should consider methods of reminding national funding agencies of the importance of health information. The Regional Office should support centres in raising awareness of the importance of their role within their country and their host institution by providing promotional material and by publicly acknowledging their work.

Networking

16. As the centre of the documentation centre network, the Regional Office should:

- compile a directory of documentation centres, based on responses to a questionnaire;
- act as a reference centre on health documentation and health information technology;
- facilitate twinning between interested centres;
- provide information and training on WHO activities;
- prepare a glossary of documentation terms and codes used by WHO and provide a list of WHO databases;
- provide a list of reference points within WHO headquarters and the Regional Office;
- send a staff member to visit the documentation centres; and
- produce at least two issues a year of the newsletter *Ex libris*.

17. As part of the network, each documentation centre should:

- offer mutual assistance through training, written material and personal advice;
- participate in planning the programme of the next meeting of the centres;
- participate, as appropriate, in task forces to review the practice of document exchange between centres, and study how other networks function; and
- participate, if requested, on an advisory board for *Ex libris*.

18. The Regional Office should consider designating depository libraries as documentation centres. If this is not possible or appropriate, the Regional Office should facilitate communication between the centres and such libraries.

Outreach

19. Each documentation centre should choose the best way to reach target groups. This is a continuing process that should include, as a minimum, gathering statistics on the use of WHO material, identifying target groups and informing the Regional Office and other documentation centres about the approaches used to reach these groups.

Annex 1

WORKING PAPERS[a]

ICP/HBI 016/6	Role of WHO publications in the Republic of Slovenia, by T. Berger & N. Mazi
ICP/HBI 016/7	WHO documentation centre in Latvia: how much do we know about it and what needs to be done, by V. Boka
ICP/HBI 016/8	The problems related to the beginning of the Romanian WHO documentation centre, by I.-E. Csiki
ICP/HBI 016/9	The importance of networks, by M.P.J. Haines
ICP/HBI 016/10	Are WHO documents and publications competitive in Sweden?, by A. Jakobsson
ICP/HBI 016/11	Short report from the WHO documentation centre in Norway, by E. Juell
ICP/HBI 016/12	Lithuanian Library of Medicine as a documentation centre: current capabilities and problems, by D. Kazlauskiene
ICP/HBI 016/13	The use of WHO documents and publications in Lithuania: situation and problems, by M. Kretavicine

[a] Copies can be obtained from the Library, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Scherfigsvej 8, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark.

ICP/HBI 016/14	WHO documentation centre in Iceland, by K. O. Palmason
ICP/HBI 016/15	Activities of the National Library of Health Sciences as the WHO documentation centre in Finland 1992–1993, by P. Pekkarinen
ICP/HBI 016/16	Distribution and utilization of WHO/EURO publications and documents in the Republic of Croatia, by M. Teuber
ICP/HBI 016/17	The Institute for Documentation and Information, Social Medicine and Public Health (IDIS) as a WHO documentation centre: present situation and proposal for further developments, by M. Urhahn
ICP/HBI 016/18	WHO support to health information services in its Member States: memory, access, action, by D. Avriel & B. Aronson
ICP/HBI 016/19	Distribution of WHO publications, by C. Capitoni & A. Wieboldt

Annex 2

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIRST MEETING OF THE DOCUMENTATION CENTRES

Fig. 1 shows the extent to which the following recommendations[a] of the First Meeting of the documentation centres were implemented.

1. WHO documentation centres should be established, possibly consisting of a network of institutes producing a common database. Each centre should provide access to WHO materials and referral services, in one country. The centres should handle all Regional Office documentation and should receive free copies of any headquarters documents they select. A recommended level of activities is given in Annex 1.

2. To make sure that WHO documentation reaches the level of staff for whom it is most useful, the Regional Office should ask health ministries to distribute it – with the help of the WHO documentation centres – to regional and local health administrations, especially those responsible for public health and training.

3. WHO should inform the United Nations and other specialized agencies about the centres, so that they can provide the documentation centres with the relevant information.

4. The Regional Office should arrange for any or all WHO documentation centres to be included on the headquarters units' mailing lists for documents included in WHODOC, so that each receives as full a set as possible of WHO documents. Centres wanting only selected documents should receive free copies on request.

5. Each centre should launch or coordinate the production of an HFA database, including records made available for WHO's own databases. Some groups of countries may prefer to pool their resources. In other

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[a] *WHO documentation and health for all in Europe*: report on a WHO Working Group. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 1991 (document EUR/ICP/HBI 014).

cases, a network of contributors to the database may be more appropriate.

6. WHO documentation centres should form themselves into a network.

7. WHO's libraries in Geneva and Copenhagen should provide the documentation centres with references to publications from the Untied Nations and other specialized agencies.

8. The Regional Office should ask linguistic experts to find a suitable name for the centres.

9. The Regional Office should continue to produce EURODOC and to establish routines for harmonizing it with WHOLIS. These two databases should be mounted, either alone or as subfiles of another database, on several major hosts, so that they are available direct and in their entirety to users in Member States.

10. The Regional Office should maintain a clear distinction between *publications* and *documents*, and state in all its catalogues, lists, publicity and press releases to which category each item belongs.

11. Records of all items in WHOLIS and EURODOC should include quality abstracts. If a translated summary has been produced, it should where practicable be included in the electronic versions of EURODOC and WHOLIS.

12. The Regional Office should commission HFA databases. Member States are asked in the European HFA information strategy to create such directories, but a Region-wide list should be drawn up as a matter of high priority, taking existing directories into account.

13. WHO headquarters should commission research on effective methods of studying the use of WHO documentation, taking advantage of the experience gained with past studies. The Regional Office should also encourage studies on how and to what extent its documentation is used.

14. The Regional Office should encourage Member States to investigate the need for translations into national languages.

15. The Regional Office should encourage Member States to make resources available for translating, adapting or summarizing WHO documentation into national languages. The WHO documentation centre should select suitable items.

16. The Regional Office should encourage and support local and regional initiatives to publicize and promote WHO documentation.

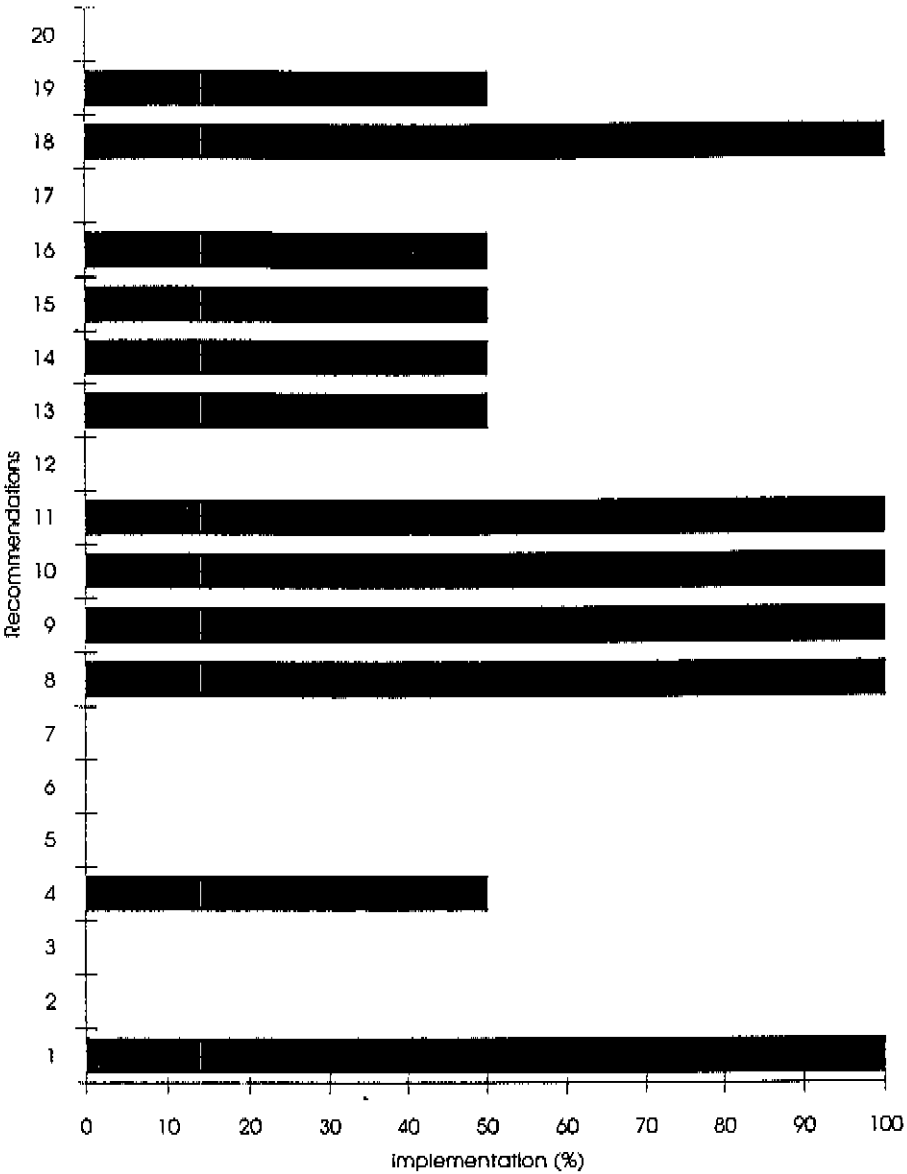
17. The Regional Office should require all existing depository libraries to report what they do to provide access to WHO documentation and referral services. If they are not satisfactory, the deposit should stop and be transferred to another institution that agrees to act as a WHO documentation centre for four years, subject to renewal (see Annex 1).

18. The Regional Office should continue with its documents supply service.

19. Regional Office documents should have a distinctive appearance reflecting a "corporate" identity and including standard cover details of good quality.

20. The Distribution and Sales units at Geneva and Copenhagen should be reinforced.

Fig. 1. Degree of implementation of 1990 recommendations



Annex 3

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WHO DOCUMENTATION CENTRES

A. Information on your library

1. General information

1.1 Name and address of the host institution:

1.2 Name of the individual responsible for the documentation centre:

1.3 Address of the documentation centre:

1.4 Telecommunications:
Telephone no.: _____
Telefax no.: _____
E-mail address: _____
Telex no.: _____

1.5 Year in which the host institution started: _____

1.6 Year of designation as a WHO documentation centre: _____

2. Focus of activity

2.1 Of host institution:

2.2 Of your library:

2.3. What subjects (e.g. public health, AIDS) does the library collection cover?

3. Services provided

3.1 What are the opening hours on:
Monday _____
Tuesday _____
Wednesday _____
Thursday _____
Friday _____
Saturday _____
Sunday _____

3.2 Is there open access to:
catalogues yes _____ no _____
collections yes _____ no _____

3.3 What are the loan conditions?

3.4 Are interlibrary loans offered? yes _____ no _____

3.5. What databases (external, such as Medline, or internal, such as your own catalogue) are available?
not applicable _____
on-line _____
CD-ROM _____
diskette _____

3.6 Are users allowed to search
internal databases by themselves? yes _____ no _____
external databases by themselves? yes _____ no _____

4. Users

4.1 What is the total (average) number of users each year? _____

4.2 What is the number of users in each of the following categories?
health professionals _____
researchers _____
students _____
administrators/managers _____
staff of public institutions _____
others _____

staff of public institutions _____
others _____

4.3 How many loans are made each year? _____

4.4 How many interlibrary loans are made each year?
lending _____ borrowing _____

5. Facilities and staff

5.1 How many staff are
professional? full-time _____ part-time _____
clerical? full-time _____ part-time _____

5.2 What is the floor space in square metres? _____

5.3 What is the annual budget for books and journals? _____

5.4 Regarding the collection, what percentage is:
paid material _____
unpaid material _____

6. Cataloguing and indexing

6.1 Do you have an Integrated Library System (ILS)?
yes _____ no _____
If yes, which software? _____

6.2 What cataloguing standards do you use? _____
Which thesaurus(i)?_____
In which language(s) do you index?
_____

6.3 Do you make abstracts? yes _____ no _____
If yes, of what material? _____

7. Equipment

7.1 Do you have computers? yes _____ no _____
How many? _____
What type (e.g. PC, mainframe, mini)? _____
What type of connection (LAN, WAN)? _____
Do you have CD-ROM? yes _____ no _____
Do you have desktop publishing? yes _____ no _____

7.2 What departments use computers?
acquisition _____
cataloguing _____
indexing _____
circulation and control _____
statistics _____
others (please specify) _____

7.3 Do you have the following equipment?
photocopying machine yes _____ no _____
microfilm-fiche reader/printer yes _____ no _____

B. Activities of your documentation centre

1. How many WHO publications, journals and documents do you have?
publications _____
journals _____
documents _____

2. Is the WHO material in a separate collection? yes _____ no _____
If yes, is there a separate reading room for the material?
yes _____ no _____

3. Consultation of WHO material

3.1 How many staff users? _____
3.2 How many external users? _____
3.3 Total number of users? _____

4. Loan of WHO material

4.1 How many are internal staff? _____
4.2 How many are external users? _____
4.3 Total number of users? _____

5. How many bibliographic searches are made each year:
for internal staff users? _____
for external users? _____
in total? _____

6. Regarding search method, how many are:
SDIs? _____
other searches? _____

7. What kind of searches are made?

on-line	yes _____	no _____
CD-ROM	yes _____	no _____
diskette	yes _____	no _____

8. Which WHO databases do you use?

WHOLIS	yes _____	no _____
EURODOC	yes _____	no _____
HFA	yes _____	no _____
EUROSTAT	yes _____	no _____
Other	yes _____ (please specify below)	no _____

9. What is your document delivery per year?
number of total requests _____
number of requests satisfied by the centre _____
number of requests satisfied by WHO _____
number of reproduced pages _____

10. What is the number of interlibrary loans? _____

11. Translation of WHO material

11.1 What is the number of unpublished translations? _____
11.2 What is the number of published translations? _____
How many copies? _____

12. What means do you use to make known the activities of your documentation centre (e.g. newsletter, update)?

13. How do you promote WHO activities and/or materials (e.g. through associations newsletters, meetings)?

14. Problems and proposals

14.1 Is there any delay in the receipt of material? If so, please give details

14.2 Is there any non-delivery of material? If yes, please give details

14.3 Have there been communication problems with:
WHO headquarters in Geneva yes _____ no _____
WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen
yes _____ no _____
Other WHO regional offices yes _____ no _____
Other documentation centres yes _____ no _____
If the answer is yes to one or more of the above, please give the details.

14.4 Other problems or remarks?

14.5 Proposals for improvements?

Date: _____ Place: _____ Signature: _____

Annex 4

PARTICIPANTS

Temporary Advisers

Professor Tatjana Berger
Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Irma-Eva Csiki
Scientific Secretariat, Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Bucharest, Romania

Joëlle Dequesne
RESODOC - UCL, Brussels, Belgium

Dr Alexander B. Fedinecz
National Institute of Medical Information and Library of Medicine, Budapest, Hungary

Rosalia Ferrara
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

Pank E.M. Geraerts
Documentation and Information, Dutch Federation for Care, Utrecht, Netherlands

Evgenia F. Gorelova
Director, Republican Scientific Medical Library, Minsk, Belarus

Margaret Haines
Information Resources, King's Fund Centre, London, United Kingdom

Dr Almaz Imanbaev
Dyrghyz Research Institute for Oncology and Radiology, c/o Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Arne Jakobsson
Library Director, Swedish Planning and Rationalization Institute for Health and Social Services (SPRI), Stockholm, Sweden

Richard Jones
British Medical Association, London, United Kingdom

Ellen Juell
Chief Librarian, Directorate of Health, Oslo, Norway

Danute Kazlauskiene
Chief Librarian, Lithuanian Library of Medicine, Vilnius, Lithuania

Ulrich Korwitz
Deputy Director, Central Library of Medicine, Cologne, Germany

Meilute Kretavicine
Librarian, Kaunas Medical Academy, Kaunas, Lithuania

Dr Christo Mutafov
Director, Medical Information Centre, Sofia, Bulgaria

Kirstin Olsen Palmason
Librarian, Directorate of Health, Reykjavik, Iceland

Päivi Pekkarinen
Librarian, National Library of Health Sciences, Helsinki, Finland

Dr Otakar Pinkas
National Medical Library, Prague, Czech Republic

Dr Gabriella Poppi
Librarian, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

Dr Dhimitraq Stratoberdha
Director, National Directorate of Health Education, Tirana, Albania

Professor Marina Teuber
Head Librarian, Andrija Stampar School of Public Health, Zagreb, Croatia

Dr Margit Urhahn
Institut für Dokumentation und Information, Sozialmedizin und öffentliches Gesundheitswesen, Bielefeld, Germany

Observers

Guillemette Chevaillier
Ecole Nationale de la Santé Publique (ENSP), Rennes, France

Mr Davide Forno
Study Centre of the Nursing Professions (CESPI), Turin, Italy

Ms Dagmar Skachková
Foreign Relations Section, Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, Slovakia

World Health Organization

Regional Office for Europe

Ms Phyllis Dahl
Clerk, Library

Ms Francesca Giampieri
Information Assistant, WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, Rome, Italy

Ms Elaine Grandjean
Manager, Library

Ms Carolyn Murphy
Director, Administrative Support

Ms Eva Nielsen
Information Scientist, Library

Mr Heinz Stocker
Library Assistant, Library

Headquarters

Ms Barbara Aronson
Office of Library and Health Literature Services

Dr Deborah Avriel
Chief, Office of Library and Health Literature Services

Ms Cecilia Capitoni
Distribution and Sales

Mr A.C. Wieboldt
Chief, Distribution and Sales