

LOCATION

South Africa and worldwide

PARTNER

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR MEDICAL AND BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING, SOUTH AFRICA
The International Federation for Medical and Biological Engineering (IFMBE) is a federation of national and transnational organisations representing practitioners in medical, biological and clinical engineering. IFMBE's aim is to encourage research and the application of knowledge, and to disseminate information and promote collaboration.

SUMMARY

The project aims to establish an International Healthcare Technology Management Centre website to act as a support, networking and reference resource for healthcare practitioners. To facilitate further dissemination of information, this website links relevant international and regional websites and includes newsletters, best-practice guidelines, policy frameworks and networking tools.

PERIOD OF FUNDING

July 2001 to January 2003

GRANT

£30,000

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Establishing the International Centre for Healthcare Technology Management

BACKGROUND

Not only do many developing countries have limited access to healthcare technologies, the potential of the technologies that are available is often not realised. One reason for this is that **healthcare technology management (HTM) practitioners** and other decision-makers often cannot find even the most basic technology-related information. Another reason is that HTM practitioners often lack the logistical and financial resources to meet their peers from other countries and regions. Given that many countries face similar challenges, there is much to be gained from pooling information and knowledge.



Healthlink Worldwide

THE PROJECT

The concept of a web-based international resource centre to support HTM activities, focusing particularly on the needs of developing countries, was first proposed by the **Working Group for Developing Countries** of the **International Federation of Medical and Biological Engineering (IFMBE)** in 1998. This led to the creation of the **International Centre for Healthcare Technology Management (ICTM)**, which provides an online reference, networking and support service to HTM practitioners, decision-makers, researchers and other analysts in resource-poor countries at the website **www.ichtm.net**

The initiative is supported by international organisations including the **World Health Organization (WHO)** and regional partners such as the **Africa Federation for Technology in Healthcare (AFTH)** who provide advocacy and promotion through

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their respective channels, and guidance about new developments and emerging knowledge.

The ICHTM approach recognises that most technology-related challenges in healthcare in developing countries require a multi-disciplinary response.

Additionally, the existing mechanisms for collaboration between different professional, regional and international organisations need to be expanded.

The challenge is to promote collaboration between organisations so that the goodwill, experience and knowledge they have can be pooled and used for the benefit of HTM

practitioners in developing countries and globally, enabling improved performance, quality and sustainability of healthcare delivery services.

The power of the Internet to communicate over large distances at low cost offers the opportunity for such communication and collaboration. As a result, the first phase of the ICHTM initiative, funded by the KaR programme, was to establish a website that includes:

- an electronic newsletter
- an HTM glossary and selected bibliographies
- best-practice guidelines and policy frameworks
- networking tools and interactive resources (for example, discussion lists, electronic conferences)
- links to international, regional and national websites and resources.

Access to the website is free of charge. The content is adapted and modified to meet the needs of target groups through piloting and ongoing analysis of user feedback. The initial working language is English, with other languages introduced as and when resources allow (a generic translator is incorporated in the website at present).

To date, the design of communication and networking tools, the implementation and testing of the server and the piloting of the website have all been completed. On the whole, the response – particularly from individual HTM practitioners – has been positive and enthusiastic.

The full benefits will be realised once the website, which was launched in January 2003, is being accessed regularly over a period of time by the different target groups. The website has benefited the IFMBE already in its discussions with WHO – for example, it forms an important part of the draft three-year plan for collaboration between the IFMBE and WHO. The website will also be used to prepare for the **World Congress on Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering** to be held in Sydney in 2003 – specifically the HTM track and related activities.

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LESSONS LEARNED

The ICHTM website was launched in January 2003, as this report was being produced, so lessons learned are preliminary:

- An established software development house is preferable to the more individualised, less-established option taken in creating ICHTM.
- Long periods of time can be spent waiting for input from stakeholders' feedback – relying on 'gut feeling' may be faster and more productive, although there is a risk of then alienating partners.
- Acting as a content facilitator rather than primary content generator is advisable with an initiative like this.
- Expressed enthusiasm does not always translate into commitment and action – this applies particularly to some of the international professional organisations that were approached initially as potential partners. It is still anticipated that these will get involved once the ICHTM is more established and its value and potential more apparent.
- HTM practitioners – especially those in poorly resourced countries – are difficult to identify, contact and characterise, and many have needs that cannot be met by this project.

FUTURE PLANS

A core development team as well as a core community of users will be established in the near future, and the content space and the user community will continue to grow. Updating and adding information will be relatively simple and resource-efficient, and IFMBE will provide an annual maintenance budget to ensure the basic site remains fully functional.

Further work is required to identify HTM practitioners in poorly resourced countries, along with their needs and constraints. People and groups who can support the activities of the ICHTM on an ongoing basis also need to be identified.