

Expanded and revamped, *The WHO Reproductive Health Library* is re-launched on WHO web site

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The *WHO Reproductive Health Library (RHL)* – an electronic review journal covering the field of sexual and reproductive health – has been published annually since 1997 by the Department of Reproductive Health and Research at the World Health Organization. Ten years on, a considerably expanded RHL No. 11 is being re-launched today in a brand new, easier-to-use format on the Internet web site of WHO (www.who.int/rhl).

RHL takes the best available evidence on sexual and reproductive health from Cochrane systematic reviews and presents it as practical actions for clinicians to take to improve health outcomes, especially in developing countries. Up till now RHL was published by an Oxford-based software company (Update Software Ltd.) on behalf of WHO.

“RHL is recognized today as a leading tool for the promotion of evidence-based sexual and reproductive health care in developing countries,” said Dr Paul Van Look, Director of the Department of Reproductive Health and Research. He added that, “Use of evidence-based interventions for sexual and reproductive health care can potentially reduce health-care costs by eliminating unnecessary procedures – that in some instances are in fact harmful – and improve the quality of care in developing countries.”

RHL No. 11 contains 140 Cochrane reviews on: sexual and reproductive health of adolescents; fertility regulation; gynaecology and related cancers; HIV and AIDS; infertility; newborn health; pregnancy and childbirth; and reproductive tract and sexually transmitted infections. In addition, for each Cochrane review there is at least one expert, peer-reviewed commentary, which includes a supplementary section entitled “Practical aspects”. RHL commentaries evaluate the findings of the Cochrane review, especially with respect to their significance for under-resourced settings. The practical aspects section present the evidence in the form of concrete actions for implementation. To help clinicians master specific details of complex interventions, RHL also includes short training videos. These and other contents make RHL one of the largest and most widely available sources of evidence-based clinical information on sexual and reproductive health for both developing and developed countries.

From the outset, RHL has been published simultaneously in English and Spanish. A Chinese version of RHL (No. 5) was started in 2005, and a French version (RHL No. 8) in 2006. In late 2007, Vietnamese joined the list of language versions of RHL (No. 8).

RHL, and all its language versions, can be accessed free of charge on the Internet in all developing countries. Under an agreement between WHO and Wiley-Blackwell (copyright holders of the Cochrane systematic reviews), the full version of RHL (Cochrane reviews plus commentaries) is also available free of charge in developed countries that have national subscriptions to *The Cochrane Library*. In other developed countries RHL is available on the Internet without access to full Cochrane reviews contained in it.

RHL is also available on CD-ROM on subscription basis. This service is primarily for readers in developing countries¹ who do not have access to the Internet. At the present time RHL has over 15 000 subscribers worldwide. In 2007, over 34 000 CD-ROMs in various language versions were distributed to clinicians, researchers and policy-makers in developing countries.

A group of six international experts in sexual and reproductive health, representing all major world regions, serve on the RHL editorial team. They guide the editorial policy of RHL, advise on the selection of Cochrane reviews for inclusion in RHL and, where relevant, help to peer-review the expert commentaries. Along with some 25 other scientists, the six international experts also serve as focal points in their respective countries for the promotion and dissemination of RHL within their respective countries or regions.

¹ WHO does not disseminate RHL on CD-ROM in developed countries.