

The Internet as a classroom in women's health

By Rita Luthra, MD

Imagine students in developing countries and the United States simultaneously reviewing the same medical curriculum and learning from each other. That is e-learning at its best in an Internet classroom, and it's the goal of WomensHealthSection.com.

Launched in 2002, WomensHealthSection.com is a collaborative effort between The Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC) and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations (UN). The Web site, which gets 10,000 to 15,000 visits per day from 144 countries including the US, stresses common, everyday health-care issues in women's health.

WomensHealthSection.com is designed to educate health-care providers and policy-makers who are working for safe motherhood and to connect those in industrialized and developing countries.

The Web site provides comprehensive overviews of topics such as violence against women, obstetrics, gynecology, urogynecology, and health-care policies and women's health. A subsection on obstetric fistula provides insight into this devastating problem in developing countries.

Most importantly, the material on WomensHealthSection.com is available in the six official languages of the UN: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The translations, we believe, will increase understanding of the medical literature and help foster networks of health-care providers around the globe. The content is

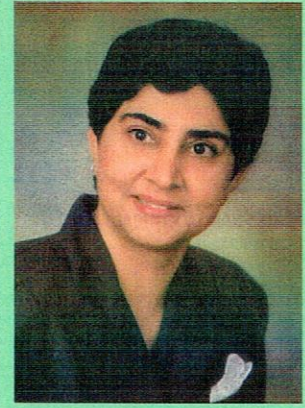
designed to serve as a comprehensive review and a reference to facilitate understanding of disease processes. Most of all, however, we hope that our Web site will motivate future research that will increase understanding of reproductive health.

Internet classrooms such as WomensHealthSection.com are the most cost-effective way to provide continuing medical education (CME) both here and abroad. Health-care providers in the US, Canada, and UK already have an extra incentive to stay up-to-date on medical advances because CME is a requirement

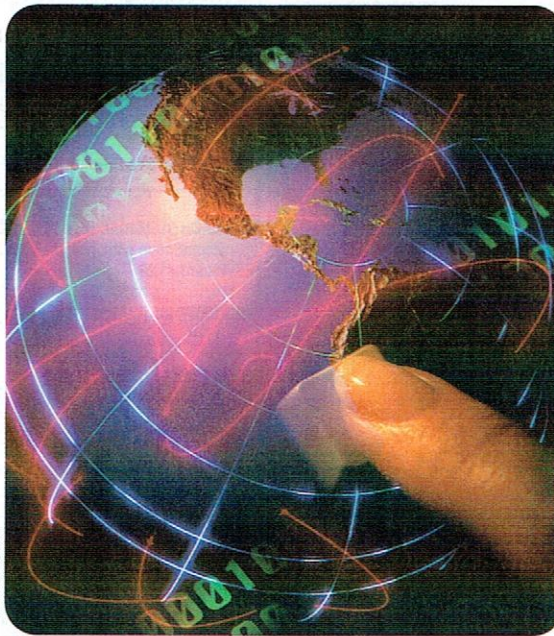
for their medical licensing. Many other countries are in the process of adopting similar standards, which will only increase the need for evidence-based medical information.

Over the years, the UN, governments, civil societies, and individuals have put forth countless plans of action for reducing maternal mortality and morbidity. According to the World Health Organization, at least 1,600 women will die today from a complication of pregnancy or childbirth, most of them in developing countries. No technical or political

approach—no matter how well intentioned—has ever conquered this enormous problem. What is needed is broader dissemination of medical knowledge. And Internet classrooms and initiatives such as WomensHealthSection.com can help further that goal. □



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