

Surgery – from scalpel to subject matter

John Eyers surveys the web for another set of valuable recommendations



In the last issue of *Africa Health*, Bryan Pearson highlighted in his editorial the problems of task-shifting and how to ensure high standards in clinical education and performance. A long and sometimes heated debate is currently being conducted on the HIFA2015 (<http://www.hifa2015.org/hifa2015-forum/>) email forum about standards of surgery in Africa, in particular where mid-level practitioners undertake surgical procedures. What has become clear is that adequate training and subsequent supervision are often lacking in view of limited resources (including information resources).

It has ever been thus in Africa, and recognition of this by Maurice King and others led to the publication of basic surgery manuals such as *Primary Surgery* and *Primary Anaesthesia*, both of which have been updated at regular intervals. *Primary Surgery* is now available free online <http://www.primary-surgery.org/start.html>. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other organisations have continued since then to publish a series of training manuals and e-learning toolkits and videos in surgery which include: *Surgical Care at the District Hospital* (<http://www.who.int/surgery/publications/en/SCDH.pdf>), *Integrated Management for Emergency and Essential Surgical Care* (IMEESC) tool kit (<http://www.who.int/surgery/publications/imeesc/en/index.html>), which is available as CDs and in download format, containing best protocols, disaster management guidelines, equipment lists, as well as frameworks for training workshops and evaluation. A free online paediatric surgery textbook in two volumes is *Paediatric Surgery: a Comprehensive Text for Africa* (http://www.global-help.org/publications/books/book_pedsurgeryafrica.html)

The Ptolemy Project (<http://www.ptolemy.ca>) from the Office of International Surgery, University of Toronto provides a wealth of free online resources for surgeon trainees as well as an online self-directed, journal-based course open to surgical trainees who are based mainly in East Africa and who are registered with the College of Surgeons in East, Central, and Southern Africa (COSECSA). Included in this programme is the free to all *Surgery in Africa Monthly Reviews* (<http://www.ptolemy.ca/members>), which has now published online a series of monthly surgical reviews going back to 2005. Ptolemy's

As a member of HIFA2015 (<http://www.hifa2015.org/>), John Eyers believes one of the biggest challenges for improved health in less-developed countries is ensuring that equal access to appropriate and evidence-based health information is made available to all.

comprehensive open-access surgery resources – open to all – (http://www.ptolemy.ca/open_access.htm) include journals, training websites, manuals, etc and would be an essential listing for your 'Favourites' file.

Additional surgery resources include:

- Surgical Tutor (<http://www.surgical-tutor.org.uk/default-home.htm>) – a free online resource which includes clinical tutorials, MCQs, revision notes, slides, and much else.
- Essential Health Links: Surgery and Orthopedics (<http://www.healthnet.org/essential-links/surgery-and-orthopedics>).
- Cochrane Library (www.thecochranelibrary.com or through Hinari (<http://www.who.int/hinari/en>). Undertaking clinical trials in surgery has been much more difficult to do than in other areas of medicine and consequently there are fewer systematic reviews of surgical procedures. However much progress has been made in recent years to advance the cause of evidence-based surgery and the Cochrane Library is now well worth consulting.
- MDLinx Surgery Journals (<http://www.mdlinx.com/surgery/journals.cfm>) – A popular web site for Ptolemy users (see above), this list is designed to include the most important surgery journals to keep you up to date. Free registration allows email alerts of recent article titles. See also the main page for surgery (<http://www.mdlinx.com/surgery/index.cfm>).
- Wikisurgery (<http://www.wikisurgery.com>) – I hesitate to include any resource with the prefix Wiki, but this free encyclopaedia of surgery (sponsored by the *International Journal of Surgery*) has a reassuringly rigorous quality control of its contents. With over 33 000 articles covering basic surgical skills, laparoscopy, as well as operation scripts and images, it is becoming a major resource. A community portal enables its users to comment on and recommend changes to content.
- Medical Matrix (http://www.medmatrix.org/_SPages/Surgery.asp) – Includes journals, training programmes, image banks, textbooks, major surgery websites, surgical procedures videos, and CME sites.
- African Injury Database (<http://aidb.cnis.ca/records/view>) – A programme of the Canadian Network for International Surgery, this is an attempt to catalogue the epidemic of injuries in Africa by providing journal articles with abstracts relating to individual African countries. Currently there are over 800 listed which can be searched by country, cause, or nature (using ICD codes).