International News

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Innovative Online Health Care Portal Launched in Nova Scotia, Canada
In a world where consumers can make hair appointments and order pizza online, why can’t they go online to book appointments with their health care providers? The discrepancy in access is frustrating for patients and creates a significant barrier to health care services in a world where consumers want and expect quick and easy access to everything at their fingertips. The discrepancy was addressed in Nova Scotia, Canada, with the launch of “MyHealthNS,” an online portal where patients can contact their doctors and other health care service providers and book appointments, as well as view their test results and personal medical histories. The interface utilizes RelayHealth (http://www.relayhealth.com), a secure system that meets the same security standards as online banking systems and allows patients to control who they allow to access their medical information. “It just simplifies everything greatly and, of course, it gets me really involved in managing my health,” said one patient who participated in the pilot project. During the 3-year pilot project that included 35 family doctors and over 6,000 patients, the types of doctors’ office visits that can be addressed by MyHealthNS decreased by 22%, which allowed doctors to devote more time to the patients most in need of face-to-face care. One doctor who participated in the pilot project remarked, “This is a very big deal, and I’m hopeful that it’s the beginning of other big things in the next couple of years.” Read the full story (http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/health-care-myhealth-1.3699290).

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Releases New Strategic Plan

The new strategic plan of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/gb/strategic-plan/2016-2021.pdf) (IFLA) outlines the direction and goals of the organization to guide its governance and activities from 2016–2021. The plan includes four strategic directions:

• Libraries in Society
• Information & Knowledge
• Cultural Heritage
• Capacity Building

The Key Initiatives and Activities, established to move the strategic directions forward, will be updated every two years. The strategic plan is available for download in all IFLA languages. Read the full story (http://www.ifla.org/strategic-plan).

Synthesizing the Syntheses: Next Steps for Systematic Reviews

Systematic reviews were created to combine all existing evidence on a particular health care topic into one user-friendly document to aid in decision making. However, since a large number of systematic reviews have been created, several systematic reviews may cover the same topic. Therefore, the need has arisen to synthesize these high-level syntheses to make them user-friendly once again. Two organizations, the Canada Cochrane Library (http://canada.cochrane.org) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (http://joannabriggs.org) (JBI) are working to address the need using slightly different methodologies. Cochrane focuses on its own reviews, incorporating outside reviews when necessary. JBI examines reviews from many sources more broadly. The aim is to summarize the existing reviews, but sometimes the work includes reanalysis and searches for newly released studies. Although a clear need exists to synthesize the syntheses to continue supporting.
evidence-based decision making, specific methods and standards are still being developed and debated. Read the complete story in the HLA News (http://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/HLA%20News-Winter2016-secure.pdf) article, “Taking It to the Next Level.”

International Study Analyzes Social Media Use among Medical Schools and Students

Web 2.0 technologies have revolutionized everything, including education. An international team of researchers has published the first study on the use of social media in medical schools across five countries throughout Europe, North America, Asia, and Australasia. The study explored what social media platforms are used by medical students, how they use them in general, how they use them for educational purposes, and what students' perceptions of their schools' social media presence are. Interestingly, although every medical school included in the study has an active social media presence, only 35% of students were aware of it. Although medical students reportedly widely use social media tools to support their educational endeavors, they emphasize connecting with fellow students to have discussions and share resources. Possible reasons offered for students' widespread reluctance to invite their schools into their online lives include ongoing concerns about privacy and the perceived need to separate personal and professional online presences. Still, it seems there is a role for medical schools in social media that is worth pursuing. As one Australian student stated, “The contact methods in use by the medical school are Byzantine and often hopelessly out of date.” Although social media was recognized as “more convenient to use than any other forms of communication,” it was also noted that “generally faculty staff do not use these resources well.” For more, see the full story in the Journal of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries (http://eahil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/journal-2-2016-WEB-002.pdf).