

QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Editorials

eQHC: on line at www.qualityhealthcare.com

Last year *QHC* was awarded its first official impact factor (1.306 Science Citation Index; category: Public, Environmental and Occupational Health). This issue marks another important step in the development of *QHC*—the launch in June of its full text website. From this issue an electronic version will go online at the same time as the print version is distributed. The website is hosted by HighWire Press, a division of Stanford University's Green Library. HighWire Press hosts a growing number (currently 190) full text sites of scientific and medical journals including *BMJ* and some of the *BMJ* specialist journals with which *QHC* shares interactivity and added value features. The *QHC* website will include full text searchable material and pdfs (portable document formats) from the March 2000 issue and tables of contents and abstracts of previous issues. As with our other HighWire journals, accessing the *QHC* home page lets you look at the contents of the current issue, browse the *QHC* archive, search across topics in the collected resources and across the other journals at HighWire Press—*Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* and *Health Policy and Planning* may be of particular interest. There is easy access to Medline and users can sign up for an email alerting service. Free access to *QHC* online will be available until September 2000, after which subscribers to the paper journal will continue to have access to all parts of the site. Subscriptions to the electronic version of the journal alone will also be available, and there will be options of paying for access for periods of less than a year and paying to view (and download) individual articles.

The mission statement of HighWire is to “foster research and instruction by providing a more direct link between the writers and readers of scholarly materials”.¹ Making *QHC* available online is only the first step of a wider strategy of using the web to encourage and improve communication between people interested in quality improvement. Electronic publication has already changed the way in which we access information. It also offers the potential of making journals interactive.

The papers published by *QHC* represent only a very small fraction of quality improvement work. Of course, some of this work is of interest only to local stakeholders. However, from discussion with colleagues and hearing presentations at meetings, there is clearly a wealth of experience relevant to quality improvement that would be

of interest and practical use to many others. But only a few people consider submitting their quality improvement work for publication so much of it remains known about only locally. In future *QHC* online need not be limited to electronic versions of the paper journal and could, for example, provide both space and structure for authors to post accounts of their quality improvement work so that others can learn about it, comment on it, add to it, and help to develop ideas. By providing a structure we would hope both to ease the task of writing and encourage authors to focus on those aspects of their experience likely to be of widespread interest.²

Some online journals already allow readers to respond to published papers—something that we have not managed in the paper journal despite allowing space for letters and specifically encouraging, in the Instructions for Authors, letters that comment on articles published in *QHC*. Moreover, the facility for rapid response might enable consumers who are subscribers to put forward their views and for their voices to be heard in the discussions about quality improvement. Ideas and themes emerging from rapid responses to papers could be used to guide the process of commissioning papers. The editorial team will also be considering ways of adding value to the electronic version and of using the website in the process of selection and editing papers for publication. Information and ideas that support and encourage those involved in quality improvement come from many sources. *QHC* is only one of many publications that promote quality improvement, and links between *QHC* online and other sites will in future enable subscribers to have access to a wide range of information.

QHC online offers many possibilities for improving communication between authors and readers. We welcome suggestions from authors, readers, reviewers, and consumers for its development. So, please write to us or—perhaps—get in touch through the website!

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1 About HighWire Press. HighWire.stanford.edu/about.shtml.

2 Moss F, Thomson R. A new structure for quality improvement reports. *Quality in Health Care* 1999;8:76.