INNOVATIVE OPEN–SOURCE LIBRARY
FOR INTERNATIONAL HEALTH ACTION

MED BOX
THE AID LIBRARY

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February 2014

MEDBOX.ORG — THE AID LIBRARY. TOOLS TO SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MEDBOX is an innovative online library aimed at improving the quality of health care in humanitarian action and development assistance, worldwide.

The real-time availability of relevant and up-to-date medical literature is often imperative and yet challenging to access in the context of humanitarian assistance and development work. **MEDBOX** collates the increasing number of professional guidelines, textbooks and practical documents on health action available online and brings these into the hands of aid workers: when they need it, where they need it.

Humanitarian health workers around the world can act effectively if they have access to the necessary tools.[1] The lack of access to such tools costs lives, as was proven in various scientific investigations, cumulating in the following observation: "*It is a shameful fact that […] people are still dying because their healthcare workers don't have access to the information they need*".[2] This is even more valid in situations of crisis or catastrophe, when chaos prevails and real-time access to technical information is vital.

MEDBOX aims at closing this gap by collating quality, open-access, practical documents such as clinical guidelines, assessment checklists or textbooks on one homepage, thereby allowing real-time access for humanitarian practitioners. The challenge is to better apply what we know already by allowing easy access to what is available.

In addition, **MEDBOX** will generate innovative generic checklists and survey tools for humanitarian practitioners for all aspects of work. These tools can be adjusted to any given setting and can be tailored for a variety of needs.

MEDBOX provides
- Practical resources covering all aspects of health action
- Specialised toolboxes (e.g. polio or cholera toolbox)
- Innovative generic checklists
- Individualised functions such as creating favourite's lists ("My Own MEDBOX")
- Constantly updated and revised archives
- Easy online-access and smartphone compatibility

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[1] The PLoS Medicine Editors (2013) Focusing the Spotlight on Lack of Access to Health Information. PLoS Med 10(4): e1001438. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001438

[2] Quotation from a blog from Dr. *Virginia Barbour, Editor-in-Chief, PLoS Medicine, HIFA2015 Conference: lack of access to healthcare information is lethal, May 2011*. URL: http://blogs.plos.org/speakingofmedicine/2011/05/12/hifa2015-conference-lack-of-access-to-healthcare-information-is-lethal/

The vision of this project is to contribute to quality assurance in health work. Health workers around the world can act professionally if they have access to the necessary tools.

The project aims at achieving international partnerships with non-governmental organisations, bilateral agencies, private and consulting companies and scientific and operational research institutions.

EXISTING PRACTICES

Confronted with disasters or crises, local or national organisations, or authorities in charge, do not often have necessary information or tools readily available to facilitate rapid, quality actions. Currently, many practitioners rely on piecemeal information and guidelines that are available to them through their own searching, recommendations or hearsay. Although most of the standardised tools and guidelines in humanitarian practise are available online it is not always easy to locate them.

Finding relevant documents for medical humanitarian work on the WHO online library, for example, is often challenging. During some of the more recent, large-scale emergencies in Pakistan or Haiti, UN OCHA offered only selected documents on their country-specific internet sites[3]. Yet, both websites did not contain any medical documents! Commonly, not even the Health Cluster leads are aware of the existence or quality of hands-on guidelines available online. The consequence can be a variable quality of medical responses.

Importantly, this situation is not necessarily the fault of healthcare providers or managers in humanitarian assistance. Healthcare providers can function effectively if their basic professional needs are met. It has been proven that lack of access to information for health professionals is a major contributing factor for child and maternal mortality.[4]

Some networks such as the Health Information For All by 2015 (HIFA 2015)[5], have been supporting healthcare information dissemination for several years. However, all libraries that have been set up so far have a scientific, rather than an operational focus. The online library **MEDBOX** will close this gap and add value by providing comprehensive generic ready-to-use innovative survey tools and checklists that can be tailored for everyone's use and individual needs.

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[3] See www.pakresponse.info and www.haiti.humanitarianresponse.info
[4] http://www.hifa2015.org/about/why-hifa2015-is-needed/
[5] Health Information for All by 2015, URL: http://www.hifa2015.org/

EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE

For anyone working in humanitarian settings, the necessity of immediate, up-to-date information is paramount, especially with regards to operationally relevant information such as guidelines and checklists for various health related issues. At the same time, a major limitation in providing quality humanitarian assistance is the knowledge gaps at field level. This was observed during various acute interventions in the past few years in Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Haiti and Turkey, to name but a few, recent examples. The challenge is to ensure that everyone working in humanitarian assistance "*[…] can have access to health knowledge – this is a basic human right, and a public health need as important as access to clean, clear water, and much more easily achievable.*" [6]

MEDBOX will improve the quality of health-related humanitarian action, especially at local/national levels and ultimately contribute to improving the quality of patient care by providing access to relevant tools, anytime, anywhere, in a handy, easy to use format! Furthermore, innovative user friendly checklists will be made available for individual use, adding value to timely humanitarian quality interventions. With increasing internet access largely utilised through mobile phones (as was seen in Haiti or, more recently, the Philippines), the internet will be the major source of health care information in humanitarian aid, in the future.

Quality assurance and accountability are important values in humanitarian action and receive growing attention by actors, donors and the public alike.[7] Real-time access to operationally relevant documents and innovative checklists online will facilitate application of medical standards and hence raise the quality of interventions and, consecutively, improved humanitarian outcomes and impact. Despite many calls for developments in this direction in recent years (see various footnotes), so far nothing has been developed for practical use in the field of humanitarian action. This project will be the first of its kind.

Innovative, user-friendly, generic checklists will be generated to allow humanitarian actors to quickly get an overview over a given situation and tailor interventions according to the needs. One could pick from a wide range of questions and specifications and select relevant aspects for one's own purpose. **MEDBOX** will develop a program that allows individual selection of criteria and hence be applicable to any setting.

[6] Pang T, Gray M, Evans T (2006). A 15th grand challenge for global public health. *The Lancet*, *367*(9507), 284-286
[7] Kersten, Roland, et al. "Too complicated for the field? Measuring quality of care in humanitarian aid settings." *Global health action* 6 (2013).

IMPACT

MEDBOX will improve the quality of health-related humanitarian action, especially at local/national levels and ultimately contribute to improving the quality of patient care and standardisation of health action by providing access to relevant tools, anytime, anywhere, in a handy, easy to use format! Furthermore, innovative user friendly checklists will be made available for individual use, adding value to timely humanitarian quality interventions. With increasing internet access largely utilised through mobile phones (as was seen in Haiti and more recently, also in the Philippines), the internet will be the major source of health care information in humanitarian aid, in the future.

Users of MEDBOX include those in charge of the medical relief efforts of the Provincial Disaster Committee in Baluchistan tasked with managing a flood relief; the MoH staff in Myanmar facing challenges after yet another cyclone; or a medical doctor in Syria confronted with an outbreak of diarrhoea or measles.

We envision for the future that MEDBOX and its innovative tools will be *the* instrument to use in acute humanitarian emergencies.

Examples:
1) MEDBOX rapidly established a Polio Toolbox to support Syrian health professionals in their fight against the polio outbreak in eastern Syria in October 2013, an area where international aid cannot reach due to insecurity.
2) MEDBOX set up a Haiyan Toolbox after the devastating Typhoon hit the Philippines allowing rapid access to hands-on material relevant for acute emergency response. It was quickly filled with native language material as well.

PARTNERS

Current partners
German Foreign Ministry • Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) • Médecins sans Frontières • Médecins du Monde • Caritas Germany • German Red Cross • The Johanniter • Malteser international • Arbeiter Samariter Bund / Workers Samaritans Federation (ASB) • Pharmaciens Sans Frontières • German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFAEM) • AGEG Consultants • ICON-Institute • German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association DAHW • Misereor • Die Sternsinger (PMK) • German Doctors • medico international.

More organisations are expected to join the project.

Technical support

MEDBOX receives technical support from: action medeor • All in Diary • University of Applied Sciences Fulda • Akkon University of Applied Sciences Berlin • Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict of the Ruhr University Bochum (NOHA).

Endorsement

Aktion Deutschland Hilft has endorsed the project.

Furthermore, **MEDBOX** aims at endorsements from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, the WHO Global Health Cluster, WHO ERM, the SPHERE project, IFRC and other multilateral organisations such as ECHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNOCHA, VOICE. Also the German NGO Network Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft has been approached.

PARTNER WITH MEDBOX!

The project aims at a broad partnership of multi- and bilateral agencies, international and national NGOs, consulting, as well as scientific and research institutions dealing with health related humanitarian assistance and capacity building.

Are you as inspired to support quality assurance and accountability of health care in humanitarian contexts as we are? You can do this by supporting the project financially, with online resources, such as e-books, treatment guides, IEC or health education materials, posters, videos, power point presentations etc. Or just simply place a link to **MEDBOX** to share with others.

Please visit our homepage at www.medbox.org. Additionally, you can follow latest developments of the **MEDBOX** project on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter! Feel free to contact us at info@medbox.org for further information!

MEDBOX was launched on 26. October 2013 during the Humanitarian Congress in Berlin and is still in a development state. **MEDBOX** is brought to you by the Medical Mission Institute, The Advisory Group for International Health, based in Germany.

CONTACT

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ANNEX: OVERVIEW OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PLANS

MEDBOX.ORG

ONLINE LIBRARY

- KEY RESSOURCES
- CLINICAL GUIDELINES
- REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
- PHARMACY & MEDICINES
- COUNTRIES
- COMMUNITY HEALTH

MY OWN MEDBOX
- OWN FAVOURITES
  (INDIVIDUALISED)
- GROUP LISTS
- APP

TOOLBOXES
- POLIO (SYRIA)
- HAIYUN (PHILIPPINES)
- CHOLERA
- ...

CHECKLISTS

- ASSESSMENT
- NEEDS ASSESSMENTS
- CLINICAL & PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT
- MONITORING & EVALUATION

MY OWN CHECKLIST
- CREATE OWN LISTS & SURVEY TOOLS

We are here

TIME LINE