

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE – Inquiry into access to scientific publications

World Cancer Research Fund International

The World Cancer Research Fund global network comprises WCRF International and its member organisations – national charities based in different countries (in the USA – AICR; in the UK – WCRF UK; in the Netherlands – WCRF NL; in Germany – WCRF DE; and in Hong Kong – WCRF HK). The WCRF global network has the unique role of translating scientific data into global health recommendations. These health recommendations not only inform the public on cancer prevention, but they also help to set the agenda for future cancer research and national health policies.

Background

In 1997, WCRF (World Cancer Research Fund) and its affiliate in the USA, AICR (American Institute for Cancer Research) jointly published the ground breaking report, Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: a global perspective. It remains the most authoritative report in its field. Over 30,000 copies each of the report and of its summary have been produced, distributed and sold worldwide.

The report or its summary have been translated or adapted for a number of regions and countries, including Latin America, China, Japan, India, Germany, France, Italy and the Asia-Pacific region, by authoritative external organisations. It is also used as the basis of the education programmes of the WCRF global network in the USA, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, China (Hong Kong) and France, which distribute tens of millions of education brochures and newsletters each year.

The first report, which remains current, is used by governments and official agencies to help shape international and national policies on the prevention and control of cancer; by research scientists to guide their work; by teachers in universities and research centres; by expert organisations concerned not only with the prevention of cancer, but also with prevention of chronic and other diseases; by health professionals; and by community groups, families and individuals, and the media. It is widely cited in the academic and professional literature, and at international scientific conferences, and continues to set the agenda in its field.

Responsibility for the 1997 report, its conclusions and recommendations, was taken by a panel of scientists convened by WCRF and AICR and chaired by Professor John Potter. Panel members came from Africa, India, China, Japan and Latin America, as well as from Europe and the USA. Official observers came from the World Health Organisation (WHO), WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Panel was supported by a WCRF Secretariat, and held a series of meetings between 1993 and 1997.

Second Expert Report – current project

WCRF International has now begun the process of creating, publishing and disseminating a new report to be published jointly by WCRF and AICR in 2006. Thus, WCRF International has invited a new panel of scientists, with observers from the United Nations and other international agencies, to create a second report on food, nutrition and also physical activity, and the prevention of cancer. The bulk of the work for this report will be carried out by academic institutions located in the USA, the UK and continental Europe. The second report will include all the key features of the 1997 report. As indicated in its mission, it will also incorporate all relevant developments in research science and methods of assessing scientific evidence, and in public policy and communications that have taken place since the mid 1990s.

WCRF's observations about access to scientific publications

Our 1997 report reviewed approximately 4500 journal articles and this number is expected to be about 3 times that for the 2006 report. The financial cost of remaining within the copyright law is going to be extremely high for this project, especially since such a vast amount of literature will be reviewed.

If the copyright for scientific publications were restricted to just one year, it would mean that the historical literature would be available for systematic review in an all-encompassing project of this kind, without the crippling financial burden that currently exists.

Finally, the Government should consider encouraging government-funded projects to publish their results in open access journals. This is especially important for medical research where patients freely give information about themselves to researchers in the belief that that information will be made freely available to other researchers.

I hope that the Committee finds these observations helpful.

Dr Steven J Heggie

Project Manager

Second Expert Report on Food, Nutrition and Physical Activity and the Prevention of Cancer

World Cancer Research Fund International