

Date: Tue, 13 Oct 2009 14:47:18 -0400

To: "Admiral William Fallon - Co-chair, CSIS Commission on Smart Global Health Policy" wjf@wjfallon.com

From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

Subject: **US global health strategy: Would a strong Internet/health information component be useful?**

Dear Admiral Fallon and Commissioners:

The Kaiser Foundation's conference concerning the Health Channel idea (i.e., my earlier message) also produced a visionary idea for domestic health information. The Internet is now available worldwide: You might be able to include it in the global strategic plan.

Medlineplus.gov can make America an online partner with health professionals and individuals worldwide.

### **Background**

The Internet has made the US Government's biomedical databases the most used and trusted online resource by biomedical researchers and physicians in the world. PubMed (the evolution of the older Index Medicus) was handling about 60 million searches/month in August, 2009. Across databases, the NLM Gateway in Bethesda, MD is handling about 1 billion searches/year.

Information for domestic (global) consumers/patients is online directly, without charge, through <http://www.medlineplus.gov>. Detailed, reliable and current health information about medical conditions and treatments is written in layman's language and checked by leading researchers and specialists. Physicians also use medlineplus.gov for current treatment information about conditions outside their area of specialization.

### **Medlineplus.gov in a global framework**

The idea, from Kaiser's conference, was to extend domestic awareness and linkups to medlineplus.gov. The National Library of Medicine designed prototypes (the attached announcement re Health Information Prescriptions) with working groups of local medical and speciality societies in several states and options for prescription pads and posters that could be

used by clinics and specialists.

Our CSIS Working Group on Public Diplomacy heard feedback from regional meetings of Ambassadors that - rather than more Voice of America standard broadcasts - they wanted US government initiatives that could link to the lives of men and women in all countries. I forwarded the attached announcement from medlineplus.gov to an Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy, with the suggestion that similar global projects could begin with interested Ambassadors brokering face-to-face meetings and inviting a medlineplus.gov planning team to visit. (The project works best when it supports local physicians and clinics and deepens relationships.) <2> I did not receive a response, and I did not hear from Don Lindberg (at the National Library of Medicine) that he received any requests for assistance.

Since these early discussions, the medlineplus.gov system has been extended to include quick online updates of new developments (e.g., diabetes, breast cancer) that would extend its value to patients worldwide. And (as I mentioned earlier) NIH also has a new patient registry system (with privacy guarantees, that can be used by individuals or physicians): There are projects for the 6,000+ rarer diseases (including tropical diseases), a project to enroll one million women and their physicians for faster progress in breast cancer research, databases/registries for clinical trials, and other initiatives that are global to the extent that people learn about them.

### A Russian Project?

Medlineplus.gov material is now available online in Spanish (although for domestic reasons, not as a smart global health strategy initiative). I do not know of any specific State Department projects to expand awareness of this resource in Latin America. It would be worthwhile, but the Department has had budget cutbacks over the years and may be overloaded. If they have a high-level blessing and needed appropriations, NIH/NLM might be able to move more quickly and directly. (They can be very effective internationally: Donald Lindberg was US Coordinator for the G-7 Global Health Applications Project.)

A final thought: Among the world's languages it might be helpful to build a project with a Russian translation: Former President Nixon was blunt, from his Realpolitik perspective, that the US should "not blow it" in deepening

and strengthening post-Cold War relationships with Russia. (And there are indications, in current discussions of America's strategic alliances, that Russia is being treated as a bit of a "has-been" country, with priority focus to the EU, China, Japan, etc.). Russia, as members of your Commission and staff know, has fierce national health problems, breakdowns in its public health system, and is likely to have growing domestic political conflict as economic hardships deepen. This would be a good time to build beneficial relationships to America, that can connect to people's lives throughout the country.

with my best wishes for your work,  
Lloyd Etheredge

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<1> See the MEDLINE/PubMed Statistics section on  
[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/services/faqmed.html#stats\\_](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/services/faqmed.html#stats_)

<2> There are features which can be customized and added, including translations, Website locations of local health providers, Internet features to help people with disabilities (which also can help patients with limited literacy). NLM has extensive experience, in the US, with health information/digital divide projects .

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