Asian physician pursuing graduate studies in a Canadian institution, and the online availability of the latest medical literature through my university’s subscription has opened up a new world for me, helping me to improve the quality of my research and my understanding of the issues. I am already dreading the loss of this privilege when I return home.

Medical schools and research centres in developing countries often cannot pay for the high cost of online journal access, and subscriptions to print versions are limited. In many cases, researchers have access only to abstracts (through PubMed [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi] and, more recently, Google Scholar [www.scholar.google.com]). It is difficult for residents on limited stipends to buy even single articles, which cost anywhere from US$10 upward. Furthermore, Internet access is limited, and safe online banking and credit card use are not available. As a result, residents and scientists use outdated sources for their research, which is reflected in the final quality and scientific rigour of their work.

The initiatives promoting open access that have been undertaken by CMAJ, BioMed Central (www.biomedcentral.com), SciDev.Net (www.scidev.net/) and the Public Library of Science journals, among others, are laudable. How can we encourage researchers in developing countries to share their research results and scientific rigour of their work. In many cases, researchers have access only to abstracts (through PubMed [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi] and, more recently, Google Scholar [www.scholar.google.com]). It is difficult for residents on limited stipends to buy even single articles, which cost anywhere from US$10 upward. Furthermore, Internet access is limited, and safe online banking and credit card use are not available. As a result, residents and scientists use outdated sources for their research, which is reflected in the final quality and scientific rigour of their work.

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