

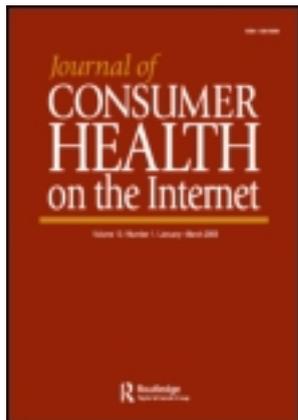
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### Hesperian Foundation

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## *HEALTH SITINGS*

*Susan Murray, Column Editor*

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### Hesperian Foundation: Publishing for Community Health and Empowerment <<http://www.hesperian.org/>>

Donna MacLeod

**ABSTRACT.** The Hesperian Foundation is a non-profit publisher of easy-to-read, well-illustrated medical information for use in communities where health care is not easily accessible. Materials are distributed with a royalty-free “open copyright” so that organizations can reproduce, translate, and adapt the materials for distribution on a not-for-profit basis. doi:10.1080/15398280802081444 *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address:*

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**KEYWORDS.** Hesperian Foundation, consumer health information, community health, empowerment, developing countries

### ***ABOUT THE FOUNDATION***

The Hesperian Foundation is a non-profit publisher of books and educational materials that support health care delivery and health education. It grew out of the work of a group of activists in Mexico in the late 1960s who compiled a notebook of treatment information for common medical problems in their village. The health care manual *Donde No Hay Doctor* was published in 1973, and a Californian organization was founded to translate it into English (*Where There Is No Doctor*) and to distribute it. The offices of the Hesperian Foundation are located on the University of California–Berkeley campus.

Since the early 1970s, the foundation has provided simply written, well-illustrated books and newsletters to help people with little formal education understand and use them. This empowers people to improve health conditions in their communities. The resources are practical, accessible, and respectful of these communities.

### ***ABOUT THE PUBLICATIONS***

Developed collaboratively with communities, health and development workers, and medical professionals from around the world, Hesperian books provide complete and accurate medical information for use in communities where medical services are not readily available. Lay health workers, trainers, health educators, and others review, write, illustrate, translate, and distribute the books, making sure the information is practical and culturally appropriate; the books are intended to help lay health workers to recognize, treat, and prevent common health problems.

An extensive review process, which involves doctors, nurses, midwives, physical therapists, pharmacists, and other health care professionals who have worked in poor communities, helps to ensure that Hesperian books remain accurate and up-to-date. Finally, community

leaders and organizers test the draft materials in their everyday work, providing feedback on content, local conditions, and relevance.

Materials are distributed with a royalty-free “open copyright” so that organizations can reproduce, translate, and adapt the materials for distribution on a not-for-profit basis. A flexible price structure and free distribution program allow people in developing countries to obtain and use the materials.

Hesperian is committed to maintaining up-to-date online (PDF) versions of their books. Statements on the online library and FAQ pages indicate their intention to post online versions of all of their publications in the coming months. As of the end of August 2007, 16 PDFs have been published (four of them in Spanish). Hesperian welcomes links to their online publications, but their publications cannot be posted on other sites without their explicit permission.

Most books are published in English and Spanish, and a number have been translated into other languages by outside organizations. The “Find a Translation” page lists over 100 languages, although it includes books that are out of print or in process. Current contact information exists where possible. Hesperian publications address the following areas: primary health care, children’s health, oral health, women’s health, environmental health & justice, disabilities, HIV/AIDS, and workers’ health.

### ***ABOUT THE WEB SITE***

The Hesperian Foundation home page <<http://www.hesperian.org/index.php>> (see Figure 1) is well laid-out, with colorful photographs, scroll-over menus listing the sections of the Web site, a link to downloadable material, and quick links to the newest information. The home page provides brief information about the site and how to get involved, a weekly weblog, and the full text of “Global Health Watch: An Alternative Report.” Links to order books or to donate to the foundation also appear. Individual items on the home page are not dated, but the copyright date of 2007 appears in the footer.

Menu options listed on the left-hand side of the screen are: “Home,” “About Hesperian,” “Action for Health,” “Current Projects,” “Publications and Resources,” “Hesperian Store,” “Get Involved,” and “Contact Us.” At the bottom of the home page are links to “Home,” “What’s New,” “About Hesperian,” “Action for Health,” “Publications,” “Hes-

FIGURE 1. The Hesperian Home Page



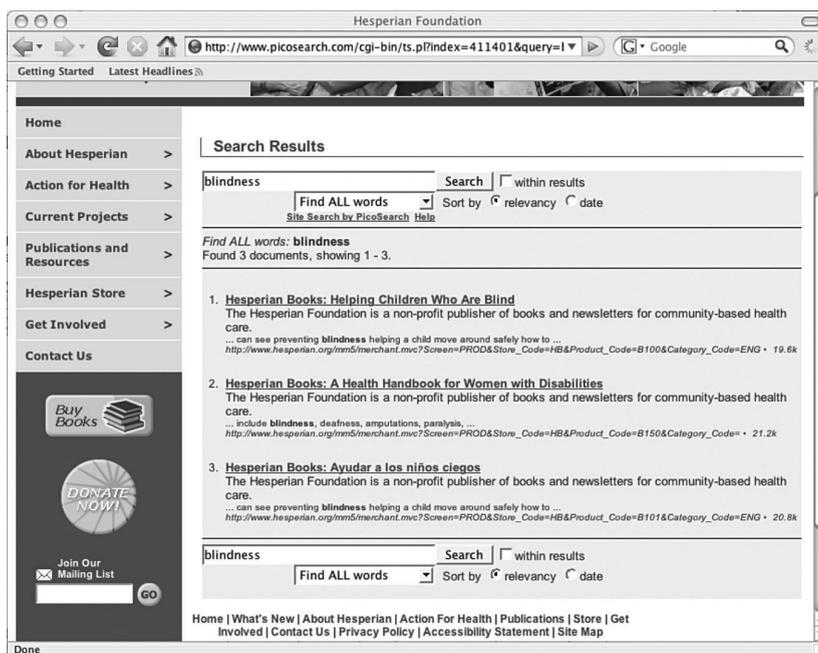
perian Store,” “Get Involved,” “Contact Us,” and “Site Map.” No disclaimer appears.

According to the site map, the site is organized into three major areas: information about the organization (history, how to participate, current projects, and more), information about publications (topics, books in progress, books in English, Spanish, and other translations), and an ordering module.

## SEARCHING

The entire site can be searched using the search box in the top right-hand side of the home page. A simple search for “blindness” (see Figure 2) yields three results, all title links to books published by Hesperian.

FIGURE 2. Search for “Blindness” on Hesperian Web Site



rian. The results page contains a second search box, which allows the user to perform a new search or to modify the initial search. The latter type of search displays the titles of the sections containing the term searched. A help panel explains the Boolean search syntax.

From the home page, clicking the “Buy Books” link brings you to the Hesperian Store, where you can browse the full product list, browse books by language, browse non-book merchandise, or perform a keyword search on the entire product list. The security features of the Hesperian Store are not explained and no “Secure Site” messages appeared. On the FAQ page about ordering, the answer to the question “Do you share my personal information with other organizations?” is simply “No, we do not share your information with anyone else. It is totally secure with us.”

When ordering, they do ask for the CVV2 number (the three-digit number located on the signature strip on the back of your credit card). If paying by Visa or MasterCard, you may submit your order online or by

phone, fax, or e-mail. A printable order form allows you to pay by personal check or money order. Payment must be made in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank.

### ***CONCLUSION***

The Hesperian Foundation delivers easy-to-read, well-illustrated medical information for use in communities where health care is not easily accessible. The organization is well-established, community-based, and inclusive. Its philosophy of respect, empowerment, and community development complement its strong commitment to medical accuracy and open distribution. The publications are well-written, thoroughly researched, and clearly illustrated—excellent examples of consumer health information.