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E.R. Watch: a searchable database of real emergency room cases

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Overview

E.R. Watch is a searchable database of consumer product-related injuries collected from 100 US hospitals. The database is maintained by the US Consumer Product Safety commission, and is used to push for product recalls, to encourage product standards, and to educate the public about hazards.

Overview

The database contains over 30,000 cases of product-related injuries collected during a 1-month period, with an online time lag of approximately 6 months (eg in January 2000 the featured month was July 1999). The database can be searched and limited by numerous fields: product type; gender; age; body part affected; injury type; clinical outcome, and date. Results are displayed as either abbreviated hyperlinks or complete case records. The case records only include the essential details, thus the site should be used to access raw figures rather than case analyses or detailed medical histories. The search facility is highly specific; for example, you can check the database for all girls aged 10 to 16 who sustained hand injuries from food processors who were treated and released from hospital. The term 'consumer products' encompasses over-the-counter drugs and therefore the database can also be used to show numbers of adverse events from common medications such as painkillers and antihistamines.

In addition to the database the site has two other sections. There is a 'featured story' from the case history archives on an issue of general public interest, featuring commentary and advice from a medical expert. The other section, 'health alert', was unavailable at the time of review.

Evaluation

This is a fascinating resource that would be of interest to the general public, to healthcare professionals working in emergency medicine, and to anyone interested in consumer health and safety issues. At present there is no way of knowing who maintains the site, or how often, and the site would benefit greatly from a 'personal' touch - for example, by including a contact name and email link for feedback. If using the database as a reference tool, eg to compile statistics, it would be useful to know the total number of cases and the population served by the 100 selected hospitals. It would also be good to have more than 1 month's figures available, so that data could be compared month-on-month, etc.

Evaluation

None.

References

1. E.R. Watch. [<http://www.erwatch.com>]