

## Web report **Is UpToDate ready for the ICU?**

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**Website** UpToDate

**URL** <http://www.uptodate.com>

**Cost Individual:** US\$495.00

**Keywords** computer-assisted decision making, critical care, intensive care units, medical informatics, online systems

Owing to the complexity of modern medical care, providers are increasingly turning to a growing arsenal of computer-based references for quick and reliable clinical information. In recent years, *UpToDate* has emerged as one of the leading subscription-based software packages. The latest version (10.2) was released in June 2002 and includes an impressive 6259 topics from the fields of internal medicine and pediatrics. Thirteen medical subspecialties are also covered, including pulmonary and critical care, gastroenterology, and infectious diseases. In most cases, the authors are established experts in their respective field.

Individual topics follow a review article format, including a brief introduction, subject explanation, some future predictions, graphics, tables, and references. The sidebar table of contents allows quick navigation to any section in the article. Whenever possible, links to other related topics are highlighted within the text. Click on a medication name and a pop-up window displays a concise monograph for the drug. Similarly, click on any reference and a pop-up window displays the citation's Medline abstract.

Although *UpToDate* is well regarded by general internists and pediatricians, I decided to challenge the software with a variety of contemporary critical care topics. These included ventilator management in acute respiratory distress syndrome, glycemic control in the intensive care unit (ICU), recombinant activated protein C for sepsis, blood product transfusions in the ICU, corticosteroid administration for refractory shock, and nosocomial infections in the ICU. Overall, *UpToDate* performed well, and consistently returned the type of results I desired. Rarely did I need to refine my search strategy. Most topics were well written and emphasized the current scientific evidence. Graphics and tables were always printer-friendly. Needless to say, the references were up to date (all topics had been revised in the past six months). Although I recommend it, be prepared to pay. All these features come with a price tag.

### **Best feature**

The deceptively plain navigation bar includes a speedy search engine that can quickly generate an impressive list of results.

### **Worst feature**

The cost (US\$495.00) will probably deter many individual users. Note that the pricing for groups and trainees is more competitive.

### **Wish list**

In cases when free full-text articles are already available online, links straight to those sites will save the user considerable time.

### **Other links**

WebMD Scientific American Medicine – <http://www.samed.com>  
The merger of online pioneer WebMD with the venerable publication *Scientific American* has resulted in yet another choice for practitioners who desire a respectable, evidence-based online reference. (Individual: US\$199.00).

MDConsult – <http://www.mdconsult.com>

With the recent addition of a Respiratory and Critical Care section, this integrated collection of peer-reviewed resources continues to keep pace with other leading subscription-based online references. (Individual: US\$219.95).

Harrisononline – <http://www.harrisononline.com>

One of the most popular textbooks of all time, *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine* is also available online, with an expanded format that also includes Medline abstracts, daily updates, and self-assessment questions. (Individual: US\$99.00).

### **Competing interests**

None declared.