Editorial
Web reports: critically appraising online resources

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Abstract

The Internet is an invaluable resource for critical care clinicians. However, the search for useful Internet resources can be frustrating and time-consuming. In this issue, *Critical Care* launches a new section entitled 'Web Reports', which will regularly provide critical appraisal of Internet resources that may be of interest to critical care health care workers.

Keywords critical care, Internet, online resources

Over the past decade the Internet has evolved tremendously in terms of technology, accessibility and content. What started as a largely academic and government computer network has become an invaluable public resource for millions of individuals, and academic, commercial and professional users. Among the two billion virtual pages available are numerous exciting and useful Internet resources for the critical care specialist, which are often not easily discovered. These include textbooks, clinical practice guidelines and journal articles, as well as interactive tools and sophisticated computer programs. The Internet can provide health care practitioners with free and rapid access to evidence-based medicine and clinical decision support tools, thereby potentially enhancing the quality of health care. Those of us who use the Internet regularly have our favourite sites but are always in search of new web resources. However, we have all experienced frustration when faced with an unfriendly site, be it because of advertisements, inaccurate or misleading content, or slow access.

This rapid and ubiquitous access to information has increased the expectations made of physicians. We now have a responsibility to provide up-to-date evidence-based care at all times. Technological solutions have the potential to allow us to meet these expectations, but the reliability of Internet-based information is sometimes questionable. Although attempts have been made to provide some degree of quality assurance for medical online resources, we still have a long way to go. Examples of these attempts include the eHealth Code of Ethics [1] and the Health on the Net

Foundation's HON Code of Conduct [2], which provide leadership in setting ethical standards for medical web site developers.

Critical Care has rapidly established itself as a reliable online and print critical care journal. In this issue, we launch a new section entitled 'Web Reports', which provides peer-reviewed evaluations of Internet resources that may be of interest to our critical care colleagues [1,2]. Although the journal previously reported on websites (from January 1999 to December 2000), health care workers were not directly involved in the selecting or writing of reports. This time the Web Reports section will be run and written by critical care health care workers for critical care health care workers.

Searching for information on the web is often intimidating and time consuming. Web Reports will generate a compendium of critically appraised critical care Internet utilities to bring some order to the chaos of the medical Internet. The reports will comment on content, credibility, navigability and appearance of the online resource [3,4]. By carefully selecting and thoroughly reviewing web resources, we hope to make Web Reports a recognized resource among intensivists and perhaps more broadly. Through this process we will expose *Critical Care* readers (and ourselves) to new, exciting and valuable Internet uses, and hopefully go some way toward improving knowledge dissemination.

Competing interests

None declared.

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