

On the Net

Medical matchmaking on the Internet

A few months ago I wrote about some rural communities that went online in search of physicians (*CMAJ* 2000; 162[3]:401). Now an organization that represents Ontario's newest doctors has taken things a step further.

The Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Ontario (PAIRO) represents about 2400 physicians-in-training. Its new Web site (www.pairoregistry.com) is an online matchmaking service for physicians and the underserved communities that are dying to recruit them. And it is yet another sign of the ongoing crisis in rural/remote medicine.

This Web portal brings doctors and communities together under a virtual roof: it allows communities to court doctors online and physicians to search for desirable places to work by spelling out their professional criteria.

"We're offering the system at no cost to all Ontario communities with

physician shortages because we think it can be an integral link in helping them recruit and retain the physicians they need," says Dr. Joshua Tepper, PAIRO's president.



The site offers 2 distinct paths. Physicians can use its search capabilities to look for communities that fit their individual preferences. They can search

by community name, region, specialty and community size. Once a list is compiled the system lets searchers move to individual community Web pages, where they can find detailed information about the towns and cities they have identified. An email link is usually available, so contact can be made almost immediately.

From the other side, the registry lets communities build a customized set of Web pages extolling their virtues. The communities provide the information and get a free Web site and listing in the PAIRO registry. All the programming is done online through an automated system, so anyone can use it.

The system went live only in May, so it is too early to tell how successful it will be. However, Tepper said an earlier version of the site had more than 30 000 page views in 1999. — *Michael O'Reilly*, mike@oreilly.net

Are MDs falling behind as demand for info grows?

Physicians now trail the combined popularity of several other sources, including the Internet, as Canadians' major source of medical information, but they remain the most trusted resource. In addition, the information they provide is deemed the most useful.

In a recent survey of 2580 Canadians by PricewaterhouseCoopers, 45% of respondents indicated that tools such as the Internet, medical journals and newsletters, brochures or print and electronic media coverage are their prime sources of health information, while just 33% cited a physician as their number-one resource. The findings were published in a recent issue of the *HealthInsider*, a research report on consumer health issues.

"Our findings would suggest that the amount of information physicians are supplying is not necessarily keeping up with consumers' demand," says Dale

McMurchy, a senior health care consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers and author of the *HealthInsider*.

"And while patients are going elsewhere for information," adds McMurchy, "this raises the whole issue of information quality. Physicians need to take a larger, more proactive role here, for example by being familiar with and recommending specific journal articles and Web sites."

Although respondents invariably reported that their doctor is a trustworthy information source, less than 5% rated the media as a very trustworthy resource; Web sites scored an 8% rating.

Similarly, physicians were cited as a "very useful" information source by nearly 60% of survey respondents. The media were deemed a very useful information source by 15% of respondents, Web sites by 35%. — *Greg Basky*, Saskatoon

Instant response to *CMAJ* articles now available

The publication cycle for letters to the editor to *CMAJ* has been shortened from months to hours. Readers of *eCMAJ* (www.cma.ca/cmaj) can now submit an eLetter in response to articles the journal has published, and the eLetters will then be screened by a *CMAJ* editor. "The goal is to post as soon as possible, and within the next business day at the latest, correspondence that contributes significantly to the topic under discussion," Editor John Hoey said of the service, which was launched with the Aug. 22 issue. The letters may also be published in the journal's paper version.

To send an eLetter, readers simply click on the mailbox icon at the bottom of the HTML text of any article.