



Free MEDLINE on way from CMA

The US National Library of Medicine (NLM) produces invaluable databases of citations and abstracts that cover much of the world's biomedical literature, as well as search software (Grateful Med). It licenses these databases — MEDLINE is the best known — for use by universities and libraries, and by companies that also develop search software and in turn license their products.

The NLM recently developed an Internet version of Grateful Med, and in June it stopped charging for Web-based searches of MEDLINE. The NLM director, Dr. Donald Lindberg, encouraged the public to search MEDLINE through the NLM Web site (www.nlm.nih.gov) to gain access "to the most current and credible medical information."

Obtaining useful search results involves more than access, however. In evaluating new online services for its members, the CMA recognized that providing free access to MEDLINE and other databases would be worth while only if access was through an intuitive interface and powerful search engine, and if novice users were offered instruction and support.

The CMA selected Ovid's search system, which medical librarians agree is the "gold standard" and superior to any other system available on the Web, including Internet Grateful Med. As well, it is being taught to medical students across North America.

To determine the support physicians would need, the CMA invited a random sample of physicians from its membership list to participate in a trial. This fall they have been searching MEDLINE, AIDSLINE, Can-

Cool site

www.cpso.on.ca

When Canada's colleges of physicians and surgeons make announcements, physicians take notice. Now the Ontario college has made it easier for them to do this by launching *CPSO On-Line*. The site, open to physicians and patients, offers data ranging from the most recent college advice and policy statements to an online edition of the college's bimonthly publication, *Members' Dialogue*, which includes summaries of disciplinary decisions. *Find A Doctor*, a service that lets users access a database to obtain names of physicians who are accepting new patients, can be searched according to specialty, sex, language skills, geographic location and hospital affiliation. *CPSO On-Line* will also provide breaking news and policy information to college members and the public. Jim Maclean, the college's communications director, thinks communications between the college, members and patients will be enhanced because the site allows users to respond quickly via email. Suggestions and comments about the site should be sent to the Website editor, Robert Foerster (foerster@cpso.on.ca).

cerLit and HealthSTAR through a private Web gateway between *CMA Online* and Ovid, and are receiving unlimited help from CMA librarians. They are also providing feedback on the search system and a customized user manual.

During the Royal College meeting in September, physicians received a taste of the new service. In a half-day workshop in a computer lab, physicians learned the basics of effective online searching of the biomedical literature. This was followed by mini-tutorials on effective searching at the *CMA Online* booth at the Royal College meeting, where they posed clinical questions and worked through searches that let them discover Ovid's rich features.

While evaluating trial results and refining the service before providing it free to all members — the new service should be available shortly — the CMA is also planning more introduc-

tory courses in its Doctors on the 'Net series, as well as MEDLINE-searching courses. Through these services Canadian physicians, armed with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools, will be able to retrieve information from the Internet efficiently for clinical, educational and research purposes. — *Ann Bolster*

New from CMA Online

Physicians interested in joining the CMA or members who wish to see which of the association's services their colleagues value most highly should check the CMA's new recruitment brochure, *Invest in Yourself and Your Profession*. It can be viewed at www.cma.ca/canmed/joincma [English] and www.cma.ca/canmed/joincma/index_f.htm [French]. Included in the brochure is a list of the membership benefits members rate most highly.