

Thyroidmanager – an example of an online textbook

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Description of the genesis and management of Thyroidmanager and links to other sites covering thyroid disease information.

Thyroidmanager <<http://www.thyroidmanager.org>> is a complete, authoritative, constantly updated, down-loadable, and free, source of information on thyroid disease and thyroid physiology. Our site began as an online version of a well known textbook, *The Thyroid and its Diseases*, but has expanded well beyond that format. We now offer a complete text on the thyroid, prepared by 20 authors from around the world. You will also find algorithms on diagnosis and management of thyroid problems, thyroid news, thyroid Internet links, case of the month, continuing medical education offerings for US physicians, and an opportunity to 'ask an expert' any question about thyroid problems. As noted, use of our site is without charge, there is no requirement to register, and we place no restriction on downloading material for personal use.

Our site is definitely written for physicians, but is frequently visited by laymen who have thyroid disease and want to expand their knowledge. It is owned and operated by a Massachusetts not-for-profit corporation, Endocrine Education Inc. The authors constitute the voting members of the corporation, who operate the organization through a board of directors and their officers. Up until now, we have been largely funded by an unrestricted educational grant from Abbott Laboratories. Their generous support carries absolutely no restriction on our independence or content, and in fact, almost unfairly, there is no reference to any Abbott product on the site.

Our authors (listed on the site) are all experts in their particular areas. Each has agreed to make a major update of his/her section at

least annually. In addition, new information is continuously 'pasted' into the site during the time between updates, whenever something of apparent importance in managing patients is reported. Our authors are dedicated to providing a complete, balanced, and non-biased, source of information for clinicians. Material submitted for publication on the site is reviewed by one of the editors, and also by outside consultants if needed. We are also happy to consider any change in our presentations suggested, with a sound basis, by our readers.

The goal of Thyroidmanager is very simple – to help physicians around the world provide the best care possible for patients with thyroid disease. We believe that dissemination of information via the Internet is already, and will increasingly be, the best way to reach practising physicians. Most doctors in the 'industrialised' nations have access to a computer and the Internet, and gradually this opportunity will expand into every corner of the earth. In contrast, it is very difficult for MDs in many nations to have access to current journals, or to textbooks, and textbooks are typically at least one year (or more) out of date when published. The cost of obtaining information via the Internet from a site such as ours is considerably lower (because it is free!) than via a printed text. Perhaps of equal significance, publishing via the Internet allows almost instantaneous updating of information – of vital importance to practitioners.

There is a vast number of sites related to the thyroid available on the Internet. The majority are specifically oriented to patients, not physicians. Unfortunately, some of the most popular sites disseminate much

material that almost any endocrinologist would consider biased, or incorrect, and even dangerous. There are, however, some outstanding sites that patients can go to for good advice, such as the site operated by The Thyroid Foundation of America <<http://www.allthyroid.org/index.html>>. Another site, Thyroid Federation International <<http://www.thyroid-fed.org/>>, assists those interested in starting a thyroid patient organisation in their home country; there are currently over 20 member organisations, including two in the UK.

Our site is directed to physicians, and thus must be compared to sites similarly organized. Several commercial sites (Medscape <<http://www.medscape.com/>>, WebMD <<http://www.webmd.com/>>) offer news and articles, and lots of advertisements, but do not provide a complete source on the thyroid. Mdconsult <<http://www.mdconsult.com/>>, Harrison's Online (Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine) <<http://www.books.mcgraw-hill.com/medical/products/honline.html>>, and Cecil Textbook of Medicine online (via various suppliers) offer excellent sources online, with some updating, for an annual fee. Up-to-Date <<http://www.uptodate.com/>> is another excellent source, generally with a much more abbreviated presentation than found in a text such as ours. It is now available online for an annual fee. We are not aware of any other complete updated textbook on the thyroid available online without charge. If readers have better information, we would be pleased to know about such sites.

We feel that we have developed an outstanding and unique site; however, we do have difficulty in 'getting the word out' to all the potential users. Many MDs do not know we exist. Once found, doctors return regularly to this very valuable resource.