

GP software provider EMIS to provide access to the EMIS GP clinical system. Since I use EMIS at work, this is an exciting prospect and I hope to take part in the early trials of this.

A device along the lines of a BlackBerry and perhaps even the Apple iPhone will eventually replace the PDA and the standard mobile phone. Sure, there are devices available now but as I have said none are perfect and there is room for improvement. In the next few years, I would expect to see a small portable device, with a built in, easy-to-use keyboard and high-speed Internet access. In addition, this device will be at ease with multimedia and have excellent address and diary sections. Such convergence encompassed within one unit will be hugely popular with health professionals as well as consumers and business people.

At the moment with my Palm, I only have Wi-Fi access to the Internet and if I want a medical textbook I have to buy a reference source which has been compiled to work on the Palm. Imagine having easy-to-use, nationally available, high-speed Internet access and being able to look at all the standard Web sites with ease. Yes, it looks like the PDA is slowly dying a death and, although many people (including myself) love their PDA – I think the Palm device is wonderful - I need to carry that and a mobile phone. When a gadget becomes available that possesses all the best qualities of the current crop of mobile devices then that will be the death knell for mass use of the PDA. It will be subsumed into this multifunctional device and that time is probably sooner rather than later. Currently, for me, the best of breed around is my Palm Tungsten TX and my BlackBerry 8700f. They are two fantastic devices that satisfy all my mobile 'digital' needs both as a consumer and a health professional. I can't wait till they become united!

Reference

1. Jaques R. PDA market continues to dive. IT Week, 9 November 2006
<www.itweek.co.uk/vnunet/news/2168280/pda-market-continues-dive>.

Current literature

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An annotated bibliography of books and articles relevant to the study and use of the Internet in the healthcare environment.

Pappas G et al. World Wide Web hepatitis B virus resources. *J Clin Virol* 2007; 38: 161–4

This study identifies and evaluates the provision of hepatitis B (HBV) information for clinicians and the public on the Internet. The aim is to highlight 'highly subjective and selective' Web sites which might provide an accurate starting point for HBV information. Google and Yahoo were used to identify Web sites, which were selected using certain criteria. The medical content was judged independently by two of the authors, and the public Web sites were judged by two non-medical personnel. For clinicians, eleven 'useful' Web sites were identified; however, not all of these provided free access. Two Web sites were singled out as having excellent content: ClinicalCareOptions <<http://clinicaloptions.com/Hepatitis.aspx>>, and The Hepatitis B Foundation <www.hepb.org>. For patients, fifteen 'useful' Web sites were identified, two mentioned specifically: the British Medical Association <www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/hepbstatus>, and the US Centers for Disease Control <www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/b/index.htm>, which provide the best set of fact sheets and question/answer lists. Many of the patient Web sites were created by patient groups and pharmaceutical companies, and may contain some degree of bias or inaccuracy; the authors question whether free access and data validity can be married. They also suggest other ways of presenting public information, and conclude that continuing thought and research should go into the

presentation of online patient information.

Sim NZ et al. Information on the World Wide Web – how useful is it for parents? *J Pediatr Surg* 2007; 42(2): 305–12

This study, based in a paediatric surgery out-patient department, identifies how many parents accessed the Internet to find out more about their child's condition, and whether the information they found was useful. A questionnaire was completed by carers of children attending consultations. Questions asked included the type of information sought, keywords used, and other sources of health information used (top of this list was the GP). Of respondents, 53% accessed the Internet and 94% of these found the information useful, of whom 66%, nonetheless, found the information too technical, too distressing, insufficiently specific, too brief or too overwhelming. Only 6% did not find the Internet useful. The authors cite studies from Bath, Oxford and Cincinnati which displayed similar results; in addition, none show a high proportion of patients discussing Internet findings with their clinicians, but they do show that clinicians remain the main source for medical information. The authors looked at Web site validation tools, focusing on DISCERN <www.discern.org.uk> and studies which have used DISCERN to demonstrate the paucity of quality Web sites available. The conclusion suggests that it should be within the remit of clinicians not only to ask patients about their Internet findings and to recommend

Web sites, but for the clinicians themselves to provide patient information on the Internet.

Gold BC et al. Weight loss on the web: a pilot study comparing a structured behavioral intervention to a commercial program. *Obesity* (Silver Spring, MD) 2007; 15(1):155-64

This study compares the weight loss achieved by two online programmes – a structured behavioural weight loss programme, and a commercial programme. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the two programmes. VTrim is a structured programme with 6 months of therapist-led interventions comprising hour-long weekly chats, weekly lessons and meetings, journals, discussion boards, homework, feedback on completed assignments, advice on calorie intake, exercise, and access to dietary guidelines, followed by 6 months of the same interventions on a less regular basis. EDiets used more self-guidance, with participants reporting their weight weekly, and receiving automated feedback, with a weight-loss goal ascertained by profile questions and answers. Meal plans were suggested and exercise encouraged with online meetings, chat rooms, and discussion boards, but there was no direct contact with a therapist. Results showed improved weight loss with the therapist-led rather than the commercial programme, and the results were similar to those expected from face-to-face intervention, including the fact that weight began to be regained after 6 months. The authors recommend that research should be done on a larger scale as the Internet appears to offer an effective yet cheaper alternative to face-to-face weight-loss treatment delivery.

Ridgway PF et al. Surgical e-learning: validation of multimedia web-based lectures. *Med Educ* 2007; 41: 168-72

With distance learning becoming increasingly popular, this study seeks to establish the efficiency of Web-

based surgical lectures. Eighty-eight students took part in the 5-week module of two lectures per week which consisted of PowerPoint slides with accompanying text and graphics. One of the weekly lectures had voice-overs to accompany the text and encourage further reading, and the main outcome measured was whether lectures with aural additions yielded better examination results than those without. Examinations were in the format of a multiple-choice questionnaire containing 50 questions from the aurally-supplemented lectures, and 50 from the non-aural. Some of the questions tested knowledge not contained in the lecture series, which would have required extra reading, and a further outcome measure was the effectiveness of the aural directions for extra reading. The results show higher results for the aural-based questions, although the outcome is less clear for aural prompts for further reading. Feedback questionnaires show a positive attitude towards both Web-based learning in addition to conventional teaching, and the use of aural supplements. The authors conclude that the efficiency of Web-based surgical e-learning is improved by the use of aural additions.

Collaborative medical news site

www.dissectmedicine.com/
'Dissect Medicine is a collaborative medical news website, which indexes and ranks international medical news. It spans general interest articles to basic research. Dissect Medicine users submit news items for review with tags and keywords. These are then ranked by the user group.' Anyone can read the news story. However, free registration is required before an individual can post links to news stories or vote. This site is a joint initiative of Macmillan Medical Communications and Nature Clinical Practice.

The use of non-human primates in research – The Weatherall Report

www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/DocumentRecord/index.htm?d=MRC003440
The use of non-human primates in research – The Weatherall Report was published in December 2006. This report contains the conclusions and recommendations of an independent working group, chaired by Sir David Weatherall, on the issue of the use of non-human primates in biological and medical research. The report concludes that: 'there is a scientific case for careful, meticulously regulated non-human primate research, at least for the foreseeable future, provided it is the only way of solving important scientific or medical questions and high standards of welfare are maintained'. Issues covered in the report include an overview of the current position within the UK of non-human primate research; the scientific basis for this type of research; infectious diseases; neuroscience and other research areas; drug discovery and development; associated welfare issues; the ethical issues raised by research involving non-human primates; and alternatives to the use of non-human primates for medical research and toxicology. The full-text report is available here for viewing and downloading (in PDF) and is 153 pages long. Made available by the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Obesity Guidance for Healthy schools Co-ordinators and their partners

www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/14/21/71/04142171.pdf
Published by the Department of Health in January 2007, this best practice guidance aims to assist healthy school co-ordinators and their partners provide support to primary and secondary schools when addressing the prevention issues around obesity. It sets out approaches that work when tackling obesity and appropriate actions that should be considered.