

by *Jessie McGowan*

Katz on the

NET

The Cats' Medical Association (CMA) recently conducted 2 continuing education courses in the Katz on the Net series. The series, named for the famous feline expert, Dr. Katz, focuses on searching for feline health information by means of the Internet and MEDLINE. In the first course, "An Introduction to the Internet," participants received a combination of lectures and paws-on learning. One impediment to the session was participant fixation with the training centre's computer hardware: many participants spent most of their time playing with the mouse. Several of the participants complained in the postcourse evaluation about the choice of mice used for the course (they would have preferred livelier versions). They also didn't like being asked to "surf the Web," because they were averse to getting wet. Suggested alternatives to this phrase included "hunt the Web," "eat the Web," and "lie in the grass, wait patiently and pounce on the Web."

In the second course, "Introductory and Intermediate Searching," participants were taught the essentials of searching MEDLINE for information about feline health issues. Although many cats may be unaware of this resource, MEDLINE contains veterinary information as well as information about the health care of feline caretakers (i.e., humans). The first step of searching involves the formation of a clinical question. For the purposes of this course, the question was "Can aggression be reduced [the outcome] in cats [the patients] when their litter boxes are cleaned by feline caretakers [the intervention or exposure]?" A literature search was performed with the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH terms) "cats," "aggression" and "behaviour, animal." The concept "cat litter" has not yet been assigned a MeSH term; however, it can be searched in the title and abstract fields by treating it as a textword (and entering "litter.tw" in the query box). The results of the search were reviewed, and the following article was selected for critical appraisal: Schwartz S. Animal behaviour case of the month. Aggression of a cat toward its owner when cleaning the cat's litter box. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1998;212(9):1384-5. This article created quite a tail swish among course participants, but their interest soon degenerated into a discussion of the pros and cons of their current caretakers. Although the instructor tried to keep the course focused, participants continued to be distracted by their mice and



got side-tracked into conversations about the possibility of new cat thumb prototypes (which would eliminate the need to wait for caretakers to open cans of food). Unfortunately, the instructor could not find any MEDLINE entries concerning this type of prosthesis.

Overall, both courses were well received. Postcourse testing revealed that the learning objectives had been met and that the participants had had a "playful" time. Suggestions for improvements included the availability of faster and bigger mice, less didactic learning and more time to play. Participants also suggested that the coffee and donuts provided for breaks be replaced with milk and tuna and that cat treats be given as incentives.

Jessie McGowan is a displaced Islander (from PEI, of course) working with CMA's Information Services. Her cat, Duncan (a.k.a. Dr. Katz), received suitable tuna-flavoured incentives to participate in the photo shoot.

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