Questions keep coming about CMA's OSLER service

Some physicians who contact the CMA's OSLER (Ovid Search: Link to Electronic Resources) Help Desk for registration information ask why they should use this free service when MEDLINE is already available for free at other Internet sites.

I offer them 2 reasons. The first is the online support available to members from the CMA's OSLER support librarian. Dedicated solely to this service, I am able to offer immediate help to those who call or send email. The issues are often technical, but more frequently members have challenging questions about MEDLINE searches.

Some have used a broad search pattern and the retrieval has been far too large to be useful, while others tuned their search so finely that not a single citation has been retrieved. With input from the OSLER user, I can execute the searches and forward the references and their abstracts by email. At the same time I can offer suggestions that will help the OSLER user retrieve elusive information using MeSH (medical subject heading) terms.

The second advantage provided by the OSLER software is the capability it provides through the Ovid search software. The search interface between the user and bibliographic databases is a highly developed and powerful means of extracting information with considerable precision. While PubMed and Internet Grateful Med both present searching screens that allow for some search refinement, Ovid's years of software development mean there are specific results quickly.

All I remember is . . .

When you want a specific reference rapidly and can remember only a fragment of the citation, choose Search Fields from the toolbar on the Ovid Main Search screen. The list that appears indicates the many fields, or searchable elements, indexed for each record within the database. A description of what each field encompasses can be found by clicking on the red 'i' beside the name of the field. To locate an article when you remember only its title, click the tick box for Title, type in the title as you remember it and hit Perform Search. You will then see the Main Search Screen, where results are listed in the search history box. Click on link 'Display' beside the results to see the retrieved reference.

Try using Search Fields to establish a set of all articles published within a specific journal. In the phrase box, type in *CMAJ* and then select Journal Name as the indexed field to search. After hitting Perform Search, you will see that Ovid found 1869 references to *CMAJ* for the years 1995–98. Did any articles about Sir William Osler appeared in *CMAJ* during those years? Click on Search Fields, choose Personal Name as Subject, then type **Osler W** into the phrase box. (With Ovid, the author's surname is always entered first, followed by an initial.) Hit Perform Search, and the Main Search Screen will indicate that there are 25 articles about OSLER. To verify if any of these articles appeared in *CMAJ*, type 1 and 2 into the Keyword box, and this will retrieve citations containing both search topics from your first and second set of references. The search found 4 *CMAJ* articles about the physician whose name is now synonymous with the CMA's bibliographic searching service.

Ovid Tip of the Month

Go to the Search Fields page and use your browser print function to print the list of indexed fields that are attached to records in MEDLINE. Note that there is some variation in the number of fields between the databases. MEDLINE records have 30 indexed fields, HealthSTAR has 38, AIDSLINE 32 and CancerLit 25. There is an abbreviation for each field, and you can use this to retrieve by search fields, directly from the Main Search Screen. Simply add the relevant abbreviation to the term or phrase that you wish to find. The Institution field (abbreviation **in**) provides the address for the primary author and is usually the source for a reprint. In 1996, authors' email addresses were included. Note that the format for typing the Search Field abbreviations requires a period or dot before and after the 2-letter term (**.jw.** for Journal Word). Use **.jw.** when you want to search for every occurrence of a journal name that contains a particular word. For instance, you may remember that an article is in a 'surgery' journal; just type in **surgery.jw.** to capture all the references to journals that have the word surgery in their title.

Questions and comments are always welcome at the OSLER Support Desk. Please send messages to **cmalibrary@sympatico.ca** or call 800 663-7336, x2255. — *Deidre Green*, OSLER support librarian