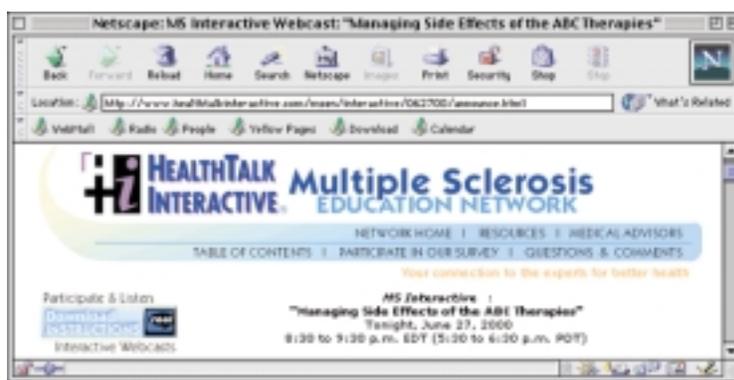# *On the Net*

Are more online conferences on the way?

Another Internet milestone was reached earlier this year with the first fully interactive Webcast of a biomedical symposium. Participants at the International Cartilage Repair Society (**www.icrs.ch**) gathering were joined electronically by specialists from around the world.

The Webcast of the conference, held in Göteborg, Sweden, included the main conference speeches and panel sessions, poster presentations and live surgery. E-participants were invited to watch using their Web browser and RealPlayer software, and submit questions via email during interactive sessions.

Although no details were available regarding the number of e-participants who logged on, organizers were expecting their servers to be as busy as servers

used during other live surgical events. But unlike these other Webcasts, which have been aimed at the public (e.g., **webevents.broadcast.com**, see screen capture of Web site below), the ICRS meeting marked the first major bio-

medical conference to be Webcast.

Although they were first, ICRS officials expect other conferences will soon follow suit. Given the reality of busy schedules and tight travel budgets, the Internet is the perfect solution for

physicians needing to attend international gatherings.

"The pressures of modern working life are now such that it is not always possible to set aside time for travelling to congresses," said Dr. Pierre Mainil-Varlet, the ICRS secretary. "Torn between the benefits to be derived from attending such meetings and the time pressures keeping us at home, we are thus forced to make a choice. Our interactive Internet project may now offer a solution for this dilemma."

For those who missed the live conference, the ICRS recorded it and is selling copies of the sessions over the Internet. The cost online ranges from US$20 for single speeches to US$190 for the whole event. A CD-ROM of the conference is also available for US$450.
— *Michael OReilly*, mike@oreilly.net

Letter from Durban

Dr. Anthony Jeffery, a family physician from Peterborough, Ont., who treats HIV-infected patients and patients with AIDS, attended the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, last month. He sent CMAJ *the following email.*

The speech given by the South African president, Thabo Mbeki, was televised live. It disappointed many of us because he did not recant his previous statements and state unequivocally that AIDS is primarily a sexually transmitted disease that is caused by HIV, and that his country is in the midst of an epidemic that dwarfs any plague in history.

Instead, he cited United Nations classification #2595 — "extreme poverty" — as the major cause of death in Africa and the developing world. He said his government is only 6 years old and only so much can be done, etc., and was heckled when he blamed "world indifference" and other factors as the cause of the AIDS epidemic.

Response was swift. The conference's first plenary speaker was Edwin Cameron, a white South African judge who is openly gay and HIV positive. He was unambiguous as he criticized Mbeki's government for its ineptitude in handling the epidemic. Judging from the applause, he echoed the feelings of most attendees when he stated that it is criminal and immoral to allow millions of people to die when the means to

save lives and prevent infections are available. Cameron acknowledged that he is alive only because his relative affluence allows him to buy antiretroviral drugs. Most of his poor, black countrymen don't have that luxury.

In his speech, Mbeki also indicated that his government has an "AIDS Action Plan" to confront the epidemic, but it includes further "study" to "determine if HIV is the cause of AIDS." This, I think, is what has enraged thousands of scientists who have been working in HIV/AIDS research and treatment for the past 20 years. A group of these scientists has produced a pronouncement called the *Durban Declaration*, in which they spell out why it is known that HIV causes AIDS.

Cameron said the situation in