



CPGs, at your fingertips

Physician interest in clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) shows no signs of abating. CPGs are known under a variety of names ranging from consensus conferences to policy statements. The CMA follows the lead of the National Academy of Sciences in defining CPGs as “systematically developed statements to help patients and physicians make decisions about appropriate health care in specific clinical circumstances.” Because their creators have sifted through the medical literature and summarized findings, guidelines provide recommendations to assist in the prevention, diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. They target specific health problems with a goal of improving patient care.

In an effort to facilitate access for physicians and other parties interested in the growing volume of Canadian guidelines, the CMA has created the *CPG Infobase* (www.cma.ca/cpgs), a free, Web-based index to the abstract and/or full-text of current Canadian guidelines that is available to anyone with Internet access. It is made possible in part by educational grants from Astra Pharma Inc., Glaxo Wellcome Inc., Merck Frosst Canada Inc. and Pfizer Canada Inc. Many of the guidelines are available in both official languages.

The *CPG Infobase* includes only current, evidence-based Canadian guidelines. To be included, a CPG must have been produced, endorsed or reviewed within the last 5 years and there must be some evidence that a literature review was undertaken during its development.

Members of the CMA's CPG project team communicate regularly with guideline developers to ensure that these conditions are met.

Development of the *CPG Infobase* is still ongoing, with access via 3 indexes: title, developer and medical category, with the latter involving medical specialty headings developed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. There is also a “recent ad-



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ditions” list that provides access to new items. Each of the 3 main indexes lists the title of the guideline followed by the applicable MeSH (medical subject heading) term.

For comprehensive searching of all CPGs, users must search the title index. However, the most popular search method is by medical category, which allows physicians to conduct a quick examination of the guidelines available in their specialty. Users can browse any of the lists or search them using the Web browser's “find tool,” which is usually accessible from the browser's menu or tool bar, or by pressing CTRL F.

To search for guidelines on MMR vaccine, a user could click on “infectious diseases” within the medical category list and search for either the key word “MMR” within the guideline title or use any of the appropriate MeSH headings, such as “measles vaccine,” “mumps vaccine”

or “rubella vaccine.” A search using only the word “measles” would locate additional guidelines, although they may be less specific. A link to the full text or structured abstract of the guideline is available by clicking on the appropriate hypertext.

The current contents of the *CPG Infobase* represent only a subset of the nearly 2000 guidelines being tracked in the CMA's internal CPG database. The association is now developing a user-friendly, Web-based search engine for this database that will allow searching by simple key word or via coded fields, such as MeSH, medical specialty, target population or publication/review date. Links to related publications such as patient guides, physician summaries and evaluation documents will be provided; they are already being incorporated in the current *CPG Infobase*. Information on the guideline process, such as the means of consensus and implementation strategies, will be available for each CPG, allowing users to compare guidelines and use them more effectively. The CMA expects this next phase to be operational late this year.

The *CPG Infobase*'s growing popularity was indicated by a recent Internet search, which showed that close to 600 direct links from around the world have already been established; this number is growing rapidly. Data on use of the infobase also point to continuous growth.

For more information, or if you require assistance to search for Canadian CPGs not yet listed in the *CPG Infobase*, click on the comments link from within the infobase to send email, or telephone 800 663-7336, x2238. — *Becky Skidmore*, manager, CPG database, CMA