



Palliative care finds a home on the Net

In 1989, 2.9 million Canadians were older than 65. By 2011, this number will increase to 5 million. In 1995, cancer claimed approximately 61 500 Canadian lives. By 2010, says Health Canada, this number will swell to more than 105 000.

Beyond Canada, the World Health Organization (WHO) projects that by 2015 some 15 million people will be developing cancer annually, in contrast to 9 million people in 1985. WHO also estimates that 110 million people could be infected with HIV by 2000.

These data mean that palliative care will be a growth area in the next century. Is medicine ready for it? "Despite the availability of palliative care literature addressing topics such as pain assessment and management in most developed countries, pain and other previously listed symptoms remain poorly controlled in this patient population," writes Dr. Doreen Oneschuk of the Edmonton Regional Palliative Care Program. "Numerous physician factors have been implicated in inadequate pain and symptom management, including deficits in physician knowledge and physician attitudinal issues. Practising physicians have reported limited or poor exposure to cancer pain management in medical school."

To help change this, organization's such as Oneschuk's are now using the World Wide Web to improve physicians' access to information on palliative care. Its site (www.palliative.org/) is owned by the Division of Palliative Medicine in the Department of Oncology at the University of Alberta and is a recognized

mecca for those seeking information.

The program's Web site targets both lay readers and professionals. The Patients and Family section offers detailed information about the process of dying, ways to deal with loss and how palliative care works.

For physicians, the site delivers current clinical information. This ranges from a Journal Watch that provides abstracts to editorials from leaders in palliative care, practice tips and a list of publications and journals.

Physicians interested in discussing palliative care issues can join an Internet-based discussion group called HOSPIC-L (Hospice Care Discussion Group). This is an email list for professional caregivers who deal with hospice and palliative care issues. To subscribe, send an email to listserv@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu with this line in the body of the message: subscribe HOSPIC-L YOUR NAME.

Some electronic newsletters are also available for physicians. The *Palliative Care Letter*, which focuses on abstracts of scientific articles, is published by a pharmaceutical company and is available for free via email. Just point your Web browser to pain.roxane.com/feedback/lte.html and complete the request form.

Meanwhile, *Pall-Connect News* supports family physicians who provide palliative care and can be found at www.pallcare.org/news.htm. It is part of the University of Ottawa's Institute of Palliative Care (www.pallcare.org/), which contains a list of services offered by the institute and some general information for patients. Two of its useful aspects are the bilingual format and annotated bibliography of books about helping children cope with death.

Looking a bit further afield, WHO has a site on cancer and pallia-

tive Care (www.who.ch/ncd/cpl/cpl_home.htm) and the University of Dundee in Scotland hosts HELP (Helpful Essential Links to Palliative Care, www.dundee.ac.uk/MedEd/help/welcome.htm). The latter site has an extensive list of short articles aimed at the clinician. Arranged alphabetically, they deal with everything from the fear of addiction to the making of wills.

For physicians wanting to learn more about palliative care, the American Board of Hospice and Palliative Medicine now offers a certification program. It covers topics such as hospice and palliative approaches to care, death and dying, pain in cancer and noncancer patients, management of nonpain symptoms, and communication and teamwork. Go to www.abhpm.org to discover how to sign up in Canada.

The Massachusetts General Hospital (132.183.171.10/mghpc/Default.htm) has a good mixture of professional clinical information. This includes abstracts and commentaries on clinical issues surrounding pain management. It is an excellent place to start when dealing with a particularly complex problem.

Finally, there is the Growth House (www.growthhouse.org/). This is described as "the Yahoo of death and dying," which means that it is a huge collection of indexed resources on hospice and palliative care. It offers information on all types of life-threatening illness and end-of-life issues.

Subjects covered include hospice and home care, palliative care, pain management, death with dignity, bereavement, and other related topics. The site even hosts a chat room where participants can converse with others in real time. — *Michael O'Reilly, moreilly@cancom.net*