



CMA Online goes to the Royal College meeting

This year's annual meeting of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada brought hundreds of doctors together in late September to discuss the latest offerings from medical science. However, the meeting also gave many of them their first chance to try some of the products and services provided by *CMA Online*, and particularly its extensive clinical resources. Staff members Deidre Green, the CMA's OSLER support librarian, and Becky Skidmore, manager of the CMA's clinical practice guideline database, provided daily training sessions on OSLER and the *CPG Infobase*.

The meeting gave staff a chance to meet face to face with many of the physicians who have registered to use OSLER, the Ovid Search: Link to Electronic Resources that is operated by the CMA. Most of the registrants attending the college meeting have been in contact with the OSLER support desk by telephone and email since the service opened last March. However, the meeting gave physicians who had obtained user names and activation codes but had failed to complete online registration a chance to review the sign-up process with Green. As well, many new requests for OSLER access codes were received. To date, more than 1500 CMA members are actively searching the databases.

For novice searchers, there were opportunities to perform complex searches with the medical librarian's help. Since the Ovid software employed by OSLER allows users to email search results, retrieved references were sent to computers across the country. When these physicians returned home, their MEDLINE searches were waiting for them.

The first visitor to the OSLER

station at the *CMA Online* booth was an 86-year-old physician who explained that his grandchildren had applied gentle pressure until he gave in and signed on to the Internet. He is now completing his own literature searches — with considerable success.

Many physicians told us how OSLER is helping them provide informed medical care. A young general practitioner from rural Quebec who practises 7 hours away from the university and hospital libraries in Montreal explained that OSLER allowed her to answer difficult clinical questions from her remote location. "Before OSLER I had absolutely no means of obtaining current medical literature," she noted.

Although doctors attending *CMA Online*'s educational sessions were particularly interested in the basics of searching MEDLINE, the value of running their search topic on AIDS-LINE, CancerLit and HealthSTAR was also demonstrated. There was also much interest in the Citation Manager function, which allows users to save and email retrieved citations, and display them for printing. CMA members who would like to inquire about OSLER should phone 800 663-7336, x2255, or send an email message to cmalibrary@sympatico.ca.



It was obvious from the college meeting that there is continued interest in the development and application of clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) in medical practice. During information sessions and at the *CMA Online* booth, physicians were introduced to the features of the *CPG Infobase*. Its recent additions were highlighted, particularly the 81 guidelines

developed by the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care (formerly known as the Canadian Task Force on the Periodic Health Examination); these have been published previously in *The Canadian Guide to Clinical Preventive Health Care*. The online version includes the task force's methodology, which was developed to assess the effectiveness of preventive health care interventions and to rate the quality of evidence used to develop clinical recommendations. This material proved particularly helpful to Dr. Kenneth Hook of Tavistock, Ont., who was able to obtain the evidence-based information he needed about the utility of teaching breast self-examination to women.

The fact that the current *CPG Infobase* represents only a subset of the more than 1500 current guidelines being tracked in the CMA's internal database of CPGs was stressed at the meeting. A new search system, or Web interface, that has much of the power and flexibility associated with OSLER will soon provide access to all of these guidelines, regardless of whether they are available in full text. Information about the guideline-development process for each guideline will also be available; this will help users make more informed decisions about the appropriateness of adopting a particular guideline.

Physicians were invited to participate in testing the usability of the new system, and several of them provided valuable feedback on the user friendliness and ease of use of the current prototype. Further testing will soon be possible from remote locations. If you would like to become a member of our online test user group, please click on the comments link from within the infobase to send email, or telephone 800 663-7336, x2238.