

REVIEWS OF WEB SITES

James C. Eisenach, M.D., Editor

Hewlett Packard Anesthesiology Village

URL: <http://interactive.medical.hp.com/mpg-anes/>

Sponsor: Hewlett Packard

This site, sponsored by Hewlett Packard, is a relative newcomer to the list of anesthesiology-related web sites. It is one of only a handful of commercially sponsored sites that do more than promote the company's products (although it does do that as one of its primary objectives). The site says it functions as a "personalized source of the latest news and information for the anesthesiology community." This is a noble goal, and one that is much needed as web sites related to our specialty begin to proliferate; however, it is obvious from the content here that this is a difficult mandate to fulfill.

Site Description

The web site features a number of different categories such as a list of other anesthesiology sites, a section listing recent news and journal articles, links to job listings, fellowship resources, societies, universities, and institutes. By far the most interesting and useful in my opinion is the Knowledge Room, which lists on-line cases, educational articles, patient education information, practice guidelines, and so forth that can be found on the internet.

Within each of these categories the user finds a list of titles of articles, sites, pages, and so forth that link back to the original resource. All of these links are listed by date; basically, as soon as the staff of the web site finds something of interest to the anesthesiology community, the title is placed as a link in the corresponding category. What results is a reverse chronological listing of topics dating back to approximately May 1998.

Additional Features

In addition to the areas available to all users, registered users can get daily news, a list of links added since their last visit, a "bookmark" function with which one can keep track of links of personal interest and receive e-mail notification of new links. The e-mail notification can be for all new links, or limited to links added in the areas of interest one specifies.

There is a search function that makes life a little easier if one is trying to locate information on a specific topic. The search is by keyword and can be done over the entire site or be limited to one of the categories mentioned previously.

Note that there is no original content on the site except the descriptions of Hewlett Packard products. All of the information is located on other web sites and only the links to them appear on the site. The only added value (other than the fact that someone else does the finding) is the listing of links into categories of interest.

Opinion

Hewlett Packard has taken on an enormous task here. There is no possible way that all the new anesthesiology-related resources on the internet can be listed in one place in a coherent fashion. In addition, not all of these resources are useful or of interest to everyone. In my opinion, this is an example of a site

that tries to do too much by trying to include every new resource that they find, even if it does do a decent job. The sheer volume of links, even if broken down into categories, makes navigation difficult and makes finding specific information tedious. In addition, the links are only listed by title, without any summary of what the content that is linked to is about and without any evaluation as to its quality, usefulness, pertinence, or so forth.

This site is best used by those not requiring direct access to information who want to get an overview of what new resources are available on the internet. Because only the link names are listed, the user still has to go to each site and review it to see if it is useful or of interest. When I use the site, I first pull up the list of new links since my last visit. I then review this list of titles for ones that sounds interesting and add them to my personal links. Once this step is done, I go through my list of personal links, manually visiting each site to see if it is really something worth looking at. Then, I either decide to bookmark it in my web browser or ignore it. Finally, I clear my personal link list in preparation for my next visit.

Conclusion

The fact that Hewlett Packard has done some of the legwork for the user in identifying new resources, categorizing them and listing them is helpful for those of us who want or need to keep up with what new resources are available on the internet. It definitely beats going through a similar process using one of the many generic and non-anesthesiology-related search engines available on the internet. However, the site does not take the extra step and summarize, review, or comment on the links that it lists. In attempting to be complete, the site sacrifices ease of use and the ability to quickly find relevant content. Although the site is still a great resource to the on-line anesthesiology world, new visitors should be prepared to spend a little time getting used to navigation of the site and even more time looking at the links in order to discover the useful content lurking within.

Paul H. Ting, M.D.

Stockbridge, Georgia
anesthesiology.guide@about.com

(Accepted for publication June 14, 1999.)

Web Site Reviews are now published on-line (full-text) with active links. For the current month's review, and all previous printed reviews, please go to <<<http://www.anesthesiology.org>>>. Click on the "Multimedia Reviews" button, and select "Web Site Reviews."