International Herpes Management Forum Website—
http://www.ihmf.org

Human herpesvirus infections are a major cause of morbidity on a global scale. Herpesviruses are life-threatening opportunistic pathogens in immunocompromised patients and have therefore attracted considerable scientific attention over the past 15 years. Discovery of three new herpesviruses brings the total number of identified human herpesviruses to eight (the α-herpesviruses: HSV-1, HSV-2 and VZV; β-herpesviruses: CMV, HHV-6 and HHV-7; and the γ-herpesviruses: EBV and HHV-8). Because of both the speed of scientific progress in this area and the diversity of clinical manifestations caused by these viruses, a substantial information need has been created. This crosses a wide spectrum of clinicians, laboratory scientists, public health specialists and patients. The IHMF website aims to rise to this challenge; its mission statement is to improve awareness, understanding and management of herpesvirus infections. Its intended target audience ranges from virologists and clinicians to patients seeking more information.

Given the enormity of this task, the IHMF has performed creditably. The site was upgraded substantially at the end of 1998 and has clearly been well maintained since then. Its main menu comprises six main sections, as follows; ‘Management Guidelines’, the IHMF journal Herpes, ‘Global Links’ (publicizes activities of expert groups), ‘Congress Centre’ (publicizes forthcoming events and reports from recent meetings), ‘Library’ (contains recent key papers, downloadable IHMF publications, Microsoft Powerpoint slide presentations and abstracts from recent IHMF conferences) and, finally, a ‘Feedback’ section inviting comments on the website. The site also features a basic search facility for key text words.

The strengths of the website are its excellent monographs and state of the art reviews, which comprehensively summarize original research. They address clinically relevant issues, such as management of herpesvirus infections in pregnancy, are authoritative and achieve a well-balanced perspective across both clinical and basic sciences. Clear graphics and well-referenced tables lend themselves superbly to teaching and, in some cases, could form the basis of patient information materials. The IHMF journal, Herpes is published three times a year; 1999–2000 editions are, for a trial period, available on-line in full text. Each themed edition contains a portfolio of state of the art reviews, which are well-written and extensively referenced. The Library section has a useful, up-to-date bibliography of recent key papers.

The site has a number of weaknesses. The Powerpoint slide presentations can be technically difficult to view or download on some PCs. The abstracts of presentations from IHMF meetings vary in quality, contain few ‘hard’ data and generally compare poorly with the excellent material within the monographs. Disappointingly, opportunities have been lost to link guidelines to the evidence base, which is, ironically, reviewed so well in many of the monographs. Finally, the site contains few hyperlinks to other key sites.

Overall, I commend the IHMF website as a high quality educational resource and source of authoritative contemporary reviews in this rapidly evolving field. Despite its wide-ranging and ambitious educational aims, the IHMF has, in creation of this website, led the way in improving awareness, understanding and management of herpesvirus infections.

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