
This is the latest TEAL CD of a series that has become established as a key resource within active anaesthetic departments. This is a review of the latest 5-yr CD version, although there is, allegedly, a 10-yr DVD version as well. The contents and access are familiar to anyone who has used the previous volumes of the CD. There do not appear to be any major changes in the software, which uses a Windows and Mac compatible format and allows several ways of searching the database of journal content. As with all educational material, it has both good and bad points.

Its main advantage over internet accessible library or search facilities is the ability to access complete papers (of Anesthesiology, the British Journal of Anaesthesia, Anesthesia and Analgesia, and the Canadian Journal of Anaesthesia) rather than the more ubiquitous Medline format of a title and abstract. The ability to print and save entire papers or just appropriate graphs to illustrate a lecture or presentation is one of the strongest points of this package.

The ‘Knowledge Finder’ software is easy to install if you have not used it before, and is almost intuitive enough to begin searching the 5-yr database. There is a handbook in the front of the jewel case, which contains enough information to make the most of the search tools. Sadly, there is no way to copy the software and the databases onto a computer without having the CD in place. Previous reviews have mentioned the variety of search strategies available. There is an option to simply review the tables of contents of the journals, but whilst this is effective, it is little better than using the bound paper versions. The other two search methods are more rapid—one uses a ‘fuzzy logic’ to match free text to appropriate papers, the other uses the more familiar dictionary approach with, for instance, keywords or authors.

The results are displayed as a page of summaries. The information is concise and is ranked according to the nearest match to the search strategy. The matching appears to be prioritized to the nearest text match and then in reverse chronological order. This sometimes makes apparently very similar papers appear out of sequence. To move from the summaries page to view the complete papers is achieved by double clicking or hitting a button with two eyes and no explanation! The page with the complete paper can also display a thumbnail area with all the illustrations, graphs and tables from the paper. This is a very valuable tool; it is of great use when the need is to find that particular graph that explains the concept so well for a presentation. Finding it (requiring moving through the windows toolbar and finding the figures-tables window) is worth the effort.

The page with the complete paper on has a few more interesting features. The cursor becomes a hand once over the text, but unlike other programs it does not scroll the text, it highlights the text for editing. Even this is a little tricky because it often misses the parts you want. There are several buttons with no explanation that with some simple experimentation appear to increase or decrease the line spacing—why?

Moving between the selected papers can be achieved by using the next/previous buttons. They can also be selected using the left and right buttons, but using the up/down ones moves to the next reference in the database. This is a little disconcerting the first time it happens, and just irritating after that.

The final irritation is the inability to copy the key elements of the reference into any of the ‘reference’ software packages. Surely the majority of purchasers of this CD will intend to use the results of their searches in one literary form or another—be it a review article, the discussion section of a paper, or even a PowerPoint slide presentation.

What do I really think about this CD? It remains a very valuable resource for a department, and is useful for individuals who need to both search for and read complete papers. It is this that allows it to stand against the internet search systems. I certainly would not be without this volume or the previous ones. However, the costs involved in buying the CD are high, and the inability to copy it to one’s ‘working’ laptop is a significant problem. It is high time the software was updated.

Would I recommend that you buy it? Yes. I would recommend that your department has one, and that it is under lock and key. The inability to load a working copy on at least one machine is a major risk when the CD is ‘lost’. The 5-yr database is complete and, unless you lose a copy, it would make sense to get a new CD every 5 yr.

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