Drug info zone

Ranked as one of the best health services in the world by the World Health Organisation, the National Health Service (NHS) which was set up more than 50 years ago in the United Kingdom, is now the largest organization in Europe. As a part of its service commitment, it aims to provide a number of informational services both for consumers and healthcare professionals. The exponential growth of the NHS coupled with modernization and a need for rapid dissemination of information to healthcare providers led to the realization that the propagation of medicine-related information had to move out of its traditional realm and assume a more dynamic role. One of the offshoots of such an initiative is DrugInfoZone (http://www.druginfozone.nhs.uk).

The e-communication team at the London and South East Medicines Information Service based at Guy’s Hospital London manages this website which has a dynamic datafeed from other reference sources for drugs and drug alerts and aims to “promote safe, effective and efficient use of medicines”. The content is independent, unbiased and evidence-based. This free service is updated daily and has a wide range of information, including drug reviews, news and current alerts.

The home page of the website is intuitive and requires an optional registration. There is a facility to explore by deciding on a category based on four common paths, the British National Formulary, the Medical Speciality, Medicine Information or the official NHS terminology. Each of the links leads to a “record” - the building blocks of the website- that consists of details such as Title, Author, Date published, Abstract, Key words, etc. Most of these records are linked to a document (PDF, Word, Excel or PowerPoint) or to original information on other websites. This method of categorizing data ensures that less time is spent in the retrieval of information. This simple organizational technique also provides reproducible and easy access even for non-professional users.

The “Products” link showcases the variety of resources that go into the making of the diverse records. These range from news, new drugs, evidence-based resources, primary care information and guidelines amongst others. The teaching resources link is especially interesting and seeks to address problems that are of concern to all health professionals. Some of the appealing topics covered are: prescribing in different age groups and special situations; dose calculation quizzes; adverse drug reactions; drug interactions and drug alerts. The repository of non-generic evidence-based guidelines are comprehensive and well arranged, these include the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines, the One Stop
Reference Shop (OSRS) and Critically Appraised Trials (CATS). The Classified Links under the products category provide hyperlinks to assorted resources of importance to prescribers and consumers, alike. The downloadable monthly publication—Smoke Signals in addition to containing news and abstracts from journals also tackles issues dedicated to building skills such as critical appraisal, internet search and networking.

Yet another feature is Pharm-line which is a bibliographic database on pharmacy practice and clinical use of drugs. It consists of about 155,000 abstracts from major pharmaceutical and medical journals. It is a paid subscription service but provides twelve months of free abstracts to all registrants. An exclusive feature of the service is a browsable thesaurus that contains most medical terms in common usage—extremely handy to hunt for an elusive term. A list of journals related to most medical specialities is available in an annotated form with hyperlinks to their websites.

The search and help features are very user-friendly and mostly icon-driven, making it even more easy to navigate the web resources. The fact that all drug-related information is cosmopolitan in nature is well embodied in the spirit of the website. The ease of use, its controlled and fast publishing process makes it ideal for seeking out answers on all aspects of medicine use by physicians, pharmacists, and researchers. The teaching resources provide authentic evidence-based solutions for education and training. The website is an unmistakable example of the innovative form in which medicine-related information will be available in the future.

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Obituary

Dr. Joy David was born on the 3rd of April 1927 in Tamil Nadu. She graduated from the Christian Medical College, Vellore in 1952 and joined the Pharmacology Department of the same Institute as Registrar in 1953. She received her MSc. (Pharmacology) in 1957 under Dr. JC David, one of the founders of Pharmacology in South India.

She was the recipient of several fellowships including the prestigious Rockefeller Special Fellowship which lead her to specialize in epilepsy research. She received FMAS in 1980 and FASc in 1982. She enriched her knowledge and experience by her visit to the University of Illinois USA, CIBA-Geigy research, Switzerland and King George Medical College, Lucknow. After her retirement she joined the Department of Pharmacology, St. John's Medical College as a Research Consultant and Convener of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Dr. Joy David has published more than 150 papers in international and national journals and was an active member of several scientific bodies such as Indian Pharmacological Society, Neurological Society of India, Indian Epilepsy Society, Indian Society for Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics and Association of Medical Advisors.

She was a pleasing personality, one with a ready smile and solution for any scientific or human challenge brought to her by her junior colleagues. Dr. Joy David was instrumental in the popularity and success of the several seminars and workshops organized at St. John's Medical College.

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