WEBSITE REVIEW

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Harnessing the world-wide-web in Eye Emergency education and training

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"I-Aid" is an intranet based website designed for use by medical officers working in the Emergency Department (ED). Since its introduction this year, "I-Aid" has been addressing the long overdue need for education in ocular healthcare for junior doctors whilst proving to be a valuable resource for the advanced clinician.

There are certain subspecialties of medicine, in particular ocular health, which are not adequately covered in Australian medical schools across the board. Similarly undertaking clinical rotations in eye emergency departments or related clinics are not readily accessible at all hospitals. Consequently it is not uncommon that a junior medical officer's first encounter with a patient with an 'eye problem' is when confronted with such a case during their emergency medicine rotation. Further adding to the anxiety in this scenario is when doctors working late night or overnight shifts are faced with 'eye emergencies' and have limited resources at their disposal to safely manage such a case. As is the normality in Emergency medicine a time-critical diagnosis and safe management is of paramount importance. In this setting reading through textbooks or pocket guides in search of best practice is often far too time-consuming.

"I-Aid", an intranet based website created by one doctor-in-training with the expertise of ophthalmologists and emergency physicians, aims to provide doctors in the ED with valid and relevant information on common acute eye presentations and offers advice on how to efficiently manage them.

The straightforward layout of the website with its 'drop-down' boxes allows quick navigation to the topic of interest or clinical dilemma. To assist the user to troubleshoot their query, common eye conditions are grouped in one of four categories:

- red eye
- orbital/lid problems
- conditions not to be missed
- non-emergency conditions

Advice regarding management contained within each category follows evidenced-based current practice. Each condition listed has assigned to it an urgency of referral to an ophthalmologist or in some cases optometrist. Included in the website is a printable referral form which prompts the user to include relevant details of history and examination findings for a particular eye condition. This referral form can be given to the patient to take with them to their specialist appointment. Evidence indicates a succinct referral like that facilitated here eases the anxiety felt by many junior doctors when making a referral to specialist especially if this is their first encounter with a particular diagnosis.ⁱ

The site also serves as an educational resource by providing step by step information for conducting a basic eye examination and in the use of equipment such as a slit-lamp. Explanations on assessment of the eye come complete with virtual demonstrations in real-time so the user can work through at their own pace. Some areas addressed include: “making sense of the Snellen chart”, “assessment of the relative-afferent pupil defect” and “testing the extra ocular muscles”.

The site also acknowledges the need for today’s doctors to share information regarding diagnoses and treatments with their patients. This is facilitated through printable, multilingual patient information handouts. This is an important feature since information given to patients in the context of a consultation has been shown to increase patient knowledge, reduce anxiety and improve compliance.ⁱⁱ However an increasing number of patients are already accessing information on healthcare themselves via the internet.ⁱⁱⁱ In order to guide our patients to access factually correct information “I-Aid” includes links to relevant medically- approved websites for particular conditions that can be communicated to patients in a consultation.

“I-Aid” presents up-to-date information in the context of evidence-based medicine. In light of this the website is regularly reviewed and updated. There is a feedback link through which doctors using the website are invited to make comments or even forward contributions which they feel may be appropriate for inclusion on the website. In this manner the website encourages corroboration of clinical expertise within the medical community.

Websites similar to “I-Aid” have been used successfully in emergency departments around the world with good results. One review reported such websites helped to enhance confidence in skills among emergency doctors and strengthened relationships with referring specialists.^{iv} To our knowledge “I-Aid” is the first site of its kind to be trialed in Australia. It has already been piloted at one large metropolitan teaching hospital Emergency department and is planned for use at several regional hospitals in the near future.

Further information with regards to this website may be forwarded to the following email address: crajakul@gmail.com

References

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