The Virtual Dental Center: A Resource for Research and Education on the WWW

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The Virtual Dental Center is a scientific and educational environment, which uses the WWW paradigm, with the objective of facilitating information interchange among dentists throughout the world.

INTRODUCTION

Since the development of the Virtual Hospital by the University of Iowa [1], in 1994, such "virtual" health care communities have become increasingly common on the WWW. They offer a rich metaphor for information searching, navigation, classification, etc., in many areas of health care, and are particularly useful for supporting continued education and decision making [2]. As more complex communities evolve, it is only natural that specialized "sub-centers" arise, addressing specific Internet health care users. In this paper we describe one of the first such specialized virtual centers in the area of dentistry and oral medicine: the Virtual Dental Center (VDC).

AIMS AND SCOPE

The VDC was initially a Department of the Brazilian Virtual Hospital, created by Prof. Renato M.E. Sabbatini in March. Due to its fast and proficuous development the Department was upgraded in September 1997 to the status of Center, with its own site (http://www.nib.unicamp.br/cov). The VDC aims at implementing a network-based scientific and educational environment, using the WWW paradigm, with all the specialties of Dentistry, with the objective of facilitating information interchange among its participants.

DEVELOPMENT

The VDC has a staff of five dentists who organize, convert and publish odontological information, with special emphasis on: Clinical Cases, Scientific Papers, Software, Clinical Decision Support, Dental Informatics and Resources on the Internet. Ten clinical cases, eight scientific papers, and the short description of 120 pathologies, included in the Clinical Decision Support Section, have been published so far.

The Software Section has two systems, both developed at our Center: DIAGFACE, for clinical decision support in the diagnosis and therapeutics of oral and facial pathologies; and ATM-PLUS, for temporomandibular joint pathologies. The Section also presents a short description of DART (Diagnostic Aid and Research Tool), and OPERA PLUS (Oral Pathology Electronic Resource ATLAS) developed in Virginia, USA, by C.L.H., and their demonstration programs can also be downloaded.

The Resources on the Internet Section presents a varied list of dental sites which can be accessed by users, such as the sites of the American Dental Association, clinics and dentists.

CONCLUSION

The VDC has been well received by the community of dentists and students in Brazil and elsewhere, thanks to the quality and diversity of its contents. We are now in the process of analyzing the site statistics and to characterize our users. The VDC has the future objective of including 100+ more pathologies to the Clinical Decision Support Section.

References

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