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Selected internet viewings

Welcome to the *Annals'* regular review of what's happening on the web, what your patients are reading and what caught our eye this month.

If you wish to review web sites in your area of expertise, please E-mail your completed reviews directly to me, Nick Cheshire, at nickcheshire@blueyonder.co.uk. Authors must NOT submit their reviews more than once.

Statistics on the web

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www.members.aol.com/johnp71/javasta6.html

Called statpages.net, this site is maintained by John Pezzullo with contributions from all over the globe with the stated mission of free dissemination of statistical knowledge. It is truly a mammoth compendium of statistical resources with over 600 links of which it is claimed that there are about 380 pages which support calculations. There are separate sections devoted to statistical tests, random number generators, range of calculators, plotters, software packages and texts. It was not practically possible to check every link, but a random check of 40 links proved the listings to be valid, robust and extremely useful. A must-visit gateway site for anyone looking for statistical resources on the web and worth book marking.****

www.my.execpc.com/~helberg/statistics.html

Maintained by Clay Helberg, this is another almost encyclopaedic resource of resources on statistics available online. It provides a list of, and links to, a range of statistical educational resources, statistics courses and textbooks, publications, software, professional organisations, institutes and consulting groups. The lists are arranged in thematic groups within which they are listed alphabetically. A short summary follows each link helping the user to navigate based on the content.****

www.stat.sc.edu/rsrch/gasp/

Also called the globally accessible statistical procedures page (G.A.S.P), it was an initiative to make statistical procedures available online but does not match the preceding two sites. Two categories of resources are available – data analysis resources and educational resources. Data analysis procedures are available

through links and include free downloadable and web-based software. The educational section seeks to explain selected statistical concepts in an interactive style with examples or graphs. Applets used to explain the central limit theorem, confidence intervals and regression are particularly useful. The downside is that: (i) it is not exhaustive; and (ii) some of the links may need updating or need special plug-ins for access.**

www.faculty.vassar.edu/lowry/VassarStats.html

Maintained by Vassar College, USA and authored by Professor Richard Lowry this site is a veritable source of statistical utilities such as statistical tables, randomiser, graph maker and sampling distribution generator. In addition, a wide range of statistical tests can be performed and are grouped under different data categories. Data may be manually entered or imported from another application of the user. It has a link to a companion site which hosts an online text resource called 'concepts and applications of inferential statistics'. The topics are discussed in some detail with examples and would especially please the mathematically inclined.****

www.ruf.rice.edu/~lane/rvls.html

Rice virtual lab is a site maintained by Rice University and authored by David Lane. It has web-based materials for teaching statistics including simulations, demonstrations and case studies to illustrate concepts. Statistical analysis tools are provided but limited. The highlight of this site is perhaps the link to the free and valuable online textbook called *Hyperstat online* which is also available directly at www.davidmlane.com/hyperstat/index.html. This latter webpage also has interesting links to statistics related humour and quotations.****

www.childrens-mercy.org/stats

Called Steve's attempt to teach statistics (STATS), this page is maintained by Steve Simon and has an emphasis on biostatistics. In addition to a glossary and links to other resources, there are three aspects of this page which make it particularly useful to the biomedical researcher. First, it features a question-answer discussion forum called 'Ask Professor Mean' with quite specific and lucid answers to a variety of real statistical problems that were faced by researchers; this could provide valuable insights to any young researcher. Second, a feature called 'Professor Mean's Library' has links to a list of full-text publications and resources on selected topics which are organised well. Third, there are sections on planning and managing research as well as guidelines for appraising medical articles especially focusing on the statistical aspects.****

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www.statcrunch.com

Formerly known as Webstat, Statcrunch is a web-based, free, data analysis package which is versatile though not comprehensive. Registered users can input data in a spreadsheet-like data table and perform calculations using commands available on the user-friendly menu bar. The data can be stored in the server for future access with password protection. Though the software itself cannot be downloaded, the results can be downloaded and saved in the user's computer for storage, reference or use in applications. ****

www.statlets.com/statlets.htm

This site features a collection of over 50 applets designed to analyse data ranging from routine descriptive and inferential statistics to the more advanced statistical process control and time series analysis. The online version and personal academic downloadable versions are free for use. ****

www.statistics.com

This site runs a range of flexible online courses for a charge with tutor support. Basic and introductory courses are available as are advanced courses on regression and meta-analysis. More useful are the links to a host of statistical resources including electronic textbooks, reference compendia, glossaries, online journals and software. Features a glossary providing brief, but useful, explanation of concepts such as Bayes theorem, bootstrapping and degrees of freedom. Also has a discussion forum where registered users could share ideas on various statistical themes or have doubts clarified. ***

www.statsoftinc.com

Though this is a commercial site it has a free educational resource in the form of an 'electronic text book' which is very useful. Power analysis and regression are well discussed in addition to basic statistical concepts. The book is searchable using key words. Distribution tables are accessible. A statistical glossary explains terms in a simple, but lucid, manner. However, online statistical tests cannot be performed. ***

Health informatics in plastic surgery

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Virtual Hospital – A digital library of health information

<http://www.vh.org/>

Affiliated to The University of Iowa, this American website provides information for patients, doctors, medical students, and health reporters. Patients can search for their condition by topic, by specialty or by body location/systems. It also includes the latest medical news for patients. It covers an extensive range of plastic surgical procedures with varying degrees of precision and

detail. The range of topics covered is vast but unfortunately the quality of information about some topics is poor. You can also upload Virtual Hospital Content onto your PDA (Personal Digital Assistant). ****

NHS Informatics Homepage

<http://www.informatics.nhs.uk/>

This is an NHS website that provides a definition of health informatics. It uses the definition of health informatics as: 'the knowledge, skills and tools which enable information to be collected, managed, used and shared to support the delivery of healthcare and promote health'. This site is aimed at nurses, midwives, GPs, consultants, suppliers, academics, librarians, students, and health informatics professionals. It has links to the National Electronic Library for Health, The Informatics Learning network, and the NHS Information Authority. It has details of upcoming events in the area of health informatics in the UK. It is a useful starter site for people who want to find out more about health informatics within the NHS in the UK. ***

WebMD with AOL Health

<http://aolsvc.health.webmd.aol.com>

WebMD is another American online health library for patients. It only includes information on aesthetic plastic surgery. It is written in conjunction with The Cleveland Clinic and covers several aesthetic procedures. These include botox, chemical peels, dermabrasion, eyelid surgery, face implants, facelift, laser resurfacing, lip augmentation, liposuction, and rhinoplasty. It also covers medical news for doctors. It has an alphabetical list of diseases, and surgical procedures to search through. ***

University of Missouri – Health Informatics

http://www.umsl.edu/~sauter/health_informatics/whatis.html

This American website is linked with The University of Missouri. It provides a definition of health informatics as a rapidly developing scientific field that deals with the storage, retrieval, and optimal use of medical information, data and knowledge for problem solving and decision making. It also contains information on the application of computer information systems to health care and public health. It discusses the application of health informatics in the design of electronic patient records, development and delivery of public health information, Construction of clinical information support systems and the use of internet technology in medicine. ***

HealthWeb

<http://healthweb.org>

HealthWeb is a collaborative project of the health sciences libraries of the Greater Midwest Region of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine and those of the Committee for Institutional Cooperation. It combines over 20 actively

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participating member libraries. This project is supported by the National Library of Medicine with the University of Illinois at Chicago and was started in 1994. The site links to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons patient information page <www.plasticsurgery.org>. News, public education, patient advocacy, and the patient photo gallery are included in this site.****

Bilateral otoplasty

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American Society of Plastic Surgeons

www.plasticsurgery.org

An excellent first stop for an introduction to otoplasty. It outlines clearly and in simple language the essentials of the operation, the types of anaesthesia used and what can reasonably be expected in terms of outcome. The risks and complications are clearly, though not comprehensively, stated. There are clear diagrams illustrating before and after images. Additionally, there is a brief discussion of other ear abnormalities, as well as an index of other cosmetic procedures covered in the site. All of this is explained in an easily intelligible manner to prospective patients. The site is also has a link to an online referral service managed by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, which is clearly of more use for the Stateside patient. Although of insufficient technical detail to be of use to surgeons, this site is of great value to patients.****

American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

www.facial-plastic-surgery.org

A website aimed at the non-healthcare professional. Very similar in structure, content, style and success to the first website. Weaker on the illustrative side, but again repeatedly stresses the need for realistic expectations. Does not consider or explicitly state the possible complications of surgery, instead stating: 'The risks are minimal'. Overall, prospective patients are well catered for, but trainee surgeons could do with a more in-depth approach.***

www.plasticsurgery4u.com

Website of Dr Michael Bermant of Richmond, USA, an American surgeon who specialises solely in cosmetic surgery. Comprehensive information for the trainee surgeon and patient alike. Excellent sections on congenital ear abnormalities, covering lop ear, macrotia, telephone deformity and Stahl's ear. There is in-depth analysis of the aberrant anatomy in each case and the surgical techniques of correction, all illustrated with high quality photographs and diagrams. This site goes into further depth than any of the other sites and yet retains a clarity of presentation that enables it to be useful to patients and surgeons

alike. In addition, there are excellent sections on other aspects of aesthetic surgery ranging from rhinoplasty, gynaecomastia and female breast surgery. Indispensable to any surgical trainee with an interest in ear surgery.*****

www.aboardcertifiedplasticsurgeonresource.com/otoplasty

Reasonable outline of the problem and the surgical detail aimed at patients and written in clear and simple language. Insufficient surgical detail for the trainee surgeon. Comprehensive detailing of the possible complications of surgery. A link to otoplasty photos promises photos will be available soon. Overall, barely adequate in terms of what it aims to do.**

www.phudson.com

Personal website of Dr Patrick Hudson which claims to be a comprehensive online information about cosmetic plastic surgery. Extremely vague outline of the surgery. Similarly thin on the ground on the anatomy page and the possible complications. Little more than a marketing tool for the Dr Hudson's clinic. Of little or no use to either patients or surgeons.*

www.emedicine.com/ent/topic110.htm

Authored by Anthony Sclafani and Jeffrey Ranaudo, the former an Associate Professor of New York Medical College. Another excellent section in this series that rarely disappoints. The description begins with a usefully and brief section on the history of the surgery for the condition with the relevant names and dates. There is a clear and concise description on the physical examination of the ear complete with references ranges of angles and measurements. The anatomy section is a little too brief and suffers with the diagrams all appearing at the end of the article rather than embedded in the text. Clear, surgical detail which would, again, benefit from juxtaposition with the relevant diagrams. Clear, postoperative management instructions and a good account of the possible complications. A brief bibliography completes this excellent account of otoplasty. Its strength is its coupling of a clear and simple explanation with enough detail for the trainee surgeon to use it as a one stop source prior to theatre.****

Bariatric surgery

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Obesity is a current epidemic. Bariatric surgery or obesity-reducing surgery is a relatively new specialty concerned with operative treatment for this condition. A Google search for 'bariatric surgery' produces 457,000 hits. Below is a list of what I think are the most informative websites for surgeons and patients. Not surprisingly, most are US based but newer UK websites are being designed as this epidemic grows.

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American Society for Bariatric Surgery (ASBS)

<http://www.asbs.org>

The American Society for Bariatric Surgery was established as an educational professional medical society in 1983. Their excellent website describes the story of obesity of surgery, gives details of upcoming courses and meetings and provides useful links to *Surgery for Obesity and Related Diseases* (the ASBS official journal) and the *Obesity Surgery Journal*. It sets out minimum guidelines for surgeons wishing to practice bariatric surgery but it states it is not intended to be, nor should it be viewed as, a credentialing body. The ASBS also markets numerous products ranging from a 'surgery for obesity' lecture slide set, DVDs, patient information booklets to neckties and 'obesity awareness' label pins.*****

British Obesity Surgery Society (BOSS)

<http://www.ukobesitysurgery.co.uk>

The British Obesity Surgery Society is the UK equivalent of the ASBS. It also lists the minimum recommendations for granting privileges in bariatric surgery in the UK, based on the Cancun statement – developed in Cancun where 14 national societies achieved unanimous agreement on these guidelines. It would appear that this website was designed a while ago and it would benefit from updating.**

International Federation for the Surgery of Obesity (IFSO)

<http://www.obesity-online.com/ifso>

This is aimed at medical professionals contemplating bariatric surgery. It has links to patient selection criteria, the original Cancun statement on bariatric surgeon qualification, and other membership directives. There is a world-wide listing of surgeons practicing bariatric surgery as well as information regarding upcoming meetings and a link to the *Obesity Surgery Journal*.**

The Obesity Treatment Center at the University Hospital, Newark, NJ

<http://www.theuniversityhospital.com/otc>

This is an excellent website set up by an academic institution for patients contemplating surgery. It takes the patient through a logical pathway starting with an online Body Mass Index (BMI) calculator. Next there is a link to an online video (requires Apple QuickTime to view) discussion of the arguments for and the different techniques used to treat obesity surgically. Following on,

there is information on what to expect in the postoperative period (on a day-day basis) as well as possible side effects of surgery, including the need for further cosmetic surgery to remove excess skin following successful weight loss.*****

British Obesity Surgery Patient Association (BOSPA)

<http://www.bospa.org>

The patient support group BOSPA has its own very useful website. Like some of the other patient-oriented websites, it describes the rationale behind surgery, types of surgery and life after surgery. Importantly, there is a link allowing patients to find a bariatric surgeon in the UK somewhere near them.****

NICE

<http://www.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=34793>

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published its own guidelines in 2002 on bariatric surgery. This document can be downloaded in PDF format from the above website. Some of their conclusions include: surgery for people with morbid obesity is associated with significant weight loss and improved quality of life and reduced co-morbidities. Although there are significant risks attached to surgery, these are thought to be outweighed by the benefits. Laparoscopic surgery is as effective as open surgery, and results in fewer complications, reduced length of hospital stay and is more cost-effective. No statistically significant differences were found between the different procedures. Although NICE favours the surgical approach to treating obesity, it mentions the need for experienced teams with appropriate assessment and support facilities performing surgery in specially equipped multidisciplinary care centres. Auditing of results as well as the need for further randomised controlled trials to compare the different procedures are essential.*****

Weight Loss Surgery Information and Support (WLSINFO)

<http://wlsinfo.org.uk>

This website was set up by a patient who underwent bariatric surgery in 2002. It shares the same information found on other patient-based websites as well as a link to a discussion forum and a frequently asked questions area. In addition, it has some of the best diagrams of the operations I have seen on the net and it has before and after photographs of patients having undergone surgery.***

e-Letters – new additions

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Since the July issue of the Annals, the following letters have been published on our website <<http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/services/publications/letters/>>:

Can performance as an undergraduate assist entry selection into surgical training programme? – 1 response