includes the mandatory advertising links, although these are small and hence not too dominating. The site is generally aimed at patient education; however, many of the articles are very detailed and contain information more suitable for junior health professionals. As a result of the amount of information available, navigating to the most appropriate article can sometimes be difficult. If, however, you are prepared to spend some time on the site, an answer can be found to most questions relating to the spine. Information provided covers a broad spectrum from anatomy, causes of back pain, through diagnosis and investigations, as well as providing detailed information on treatment options. A specific section for health professionals links to a series of animations, for patient education purposes, that cover common surgical procedures and back problems. A good site, although some patients might find it too detailed and confusing. However, for those patients that need to know everything this is the place to look.***

www.back.com

A simple web address, that patients will easily remember, leading again to an American website. However, unlike most other American sites, you are not overwhelmed with advertising. Navigation is extremely easy, with the main topics always visible to the left of the screen. The information provided on this site is informative, but concise, and clearly aimed at patients. Orthopaedic terminology is used but these words have direct links to the large glossary to help the visitor. The text is also supplemented by very clear and detailed illustrations. These could be very useful if you are planning on presenting a professional looking teaching session on backs. As with most sites, this one also offers advice on exercises for back problems. However, it is taken one step further by providing free video demonstrations of each exercise technique, which is certainly easier than following written instructions. In summary, this is an excellent site that will satisfy the needs of most patients, and the simple web address can be easily passed on during a consultation.****

www.backcare.org.uk

This is the site of the UK charity, National Back Pain Association. Until recently, this site offered access to a variety of information about back pain, and various aspects of back care. These were concise and supplemented with good illustrations. In fact, the homepage states that the site is 'designed to help you to understand more about back care and the issues surrounding back pain'. Unfortunately, free access to resources has now been withdrawn, and is only available by joining as a paying member, or by purchasing individual booklets from the online store at 95p each. Not much use if you want quick answers online.*

www.allaboutbackandneckpain.com

Another excellent American website owned and managed by DePuy Spine. As the web address suggests, this site offers detailed information on all aspects of back and neck pain. Despite the amount of information available, it remains concise and is written to a level appropriate for the lay person. There are good illustrations in some sections, but greater use of these would help complement the written material at times. The site layout is extremely good, and

navigation is very simple. This is aided by features such as the 'Topic Center', which lists the whole bank of available topics, and the 'Spine Wizard' that will suggest the appropriate pages to be read based on your current symptoms. The information is also supplemented by an 'Ask the Expert' section that contains an expansive list of commonly asked questions and answers. If after searching the whole site you still have a query, then submit your question, and this should be answered and added to the list. A simple yet very detailed website which does 'exactly what it says on the tin'.*****

Laparoscopic appendectomy

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<http://aboutplastic.surgery.uiowa.edu/surgery/phypubs/lapappendectomy.html>

Good website with a decent section on laparoscopic appendectomy comparing it with the open procedure. Very small section relevant to junior doctors and medical students who have very little knowledge of the procedure. Some photographs are on the website but not enough detail to be useful for a surgeon aiming to perform the procedure.*

www.laparoscopy.net/appy/appy.htm

An excellent, detailed website, very useful to the higher surgical trainee and a surgeon aiming to perform the procedure. It gives details on the peri-operative and postoperative management of these patients. It also shows details of operating room layout, the equipment required for the procedure and explains the procedure step-by-step for both the paediatric and adult patient. The pictures of the step-by-step part are diagrammatic and detailed, and of similar quality of an expensive surgical atlas. It also gives very good real-life pictures of a laparoscopic appendectomy being done. Highly recommended.***

http://www.umm.edu/general_surgery/lap_appendectomy.html

Very little information on this site for the medical professional. However, very good for a patient who wants to know what appendicitis is and what to expect during a laparoscopic appendectomy. It is similar to a patient information sheet given to patients in hospitals. The website lacks pictures or diagrams, and suffers as a result.*

http://www.jmmdhs.com/index.php/laparoscopic_appendix.html

This website is very useful to the uninformed patient who may be worried about the operation. Gives useful information on what the patient will go through in the peri-operative period as well as the advantage and disadvantages of the laparoscopic procedure. It is more informative than the previous website, but again lacks any pictorial displays.*

http://www.websurg.com/laparoscopic_appendectomy.htm

An excellent website for the surgeon, detailing every aspect of the procedure. This website is the gold standard for all laparoscopic procedures. It comes from the highly respected EITS institute in Strasbourg. The teaching sections are in video format; therefore, they are best viewed on a broadband internet system for optimum results. The website demonstrates the procedure in real time. To gain access to other aspects of the website requires a quick and straight forward registration process. A great website for the laparoscopic trainee.***

<http://www.pmc.org.pk/laparoscopic.htm>

An interesting article on this website comparing the practice of open appendectomy with laparoscopic appendectomy in a non-industrialised country. It is interesting to see how cost is one of their main limiting factors. The website is displayed as if it was an article in a journal. It has some useful real pictures in the website, but not enough detail for the budding laparoscopic surgeon.*

Carotid artery stenting

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www.clevelandclinic.org

Unfortunately this website does not deliver the commanding and respected impression that was anticipated. The information is not well presented, nor is it in the same depth as patient-information sites provided by other institutions. The links are limited, and the site is biased towards CAS being superior in all respects to CEA.*

www.lancastergeneral.org

This follows a well-established format and the contents are identical to many other sites encountered; it seems that all American hospitals offering CAS have subscribed to the same website designer. It is a patient-focused site, and again provides much detailed information as to who may benefit from CAS, how it is performed, and what to expect in the postoperative period. A comprehensive list of the risks and complications are also explained in depth. Perhaps too much detail is given for the casual reader, or average patient, but it does provide some useful links to other American websites.**

www.vascularweb.org

This is the official site of the Society for Vascular Surgery in the US. It is a patient-orientated site and, as one would expect of such an institution, is very informative with accurate descriptions

of the procedure and the expected risks. The disease process of carotid artery stenosis is explained, with multiple colour diagrams. Alternative treatments, including conservative therapy and carotid endarterectomy are also discussed. Links are provided to other areas of the site explaining the nature and role of imaging techniques prior to the procedure. The website is clear, and gives the patient easily accessible and authoritative information.***

www.carotid.com

This website is well designed and slick-looking, which is expected since it is produced by Boston Scientific. There are two halves to the site; one is for patient information, which remains relatively neutral in its tone. The other is directed towards medical professionals and it is here that there is real bias to the company's products. It provides a good starting point for patients and doctors to start researching CAS, but is in no way definitive.***

www.nice.org.uk

The only British website included in this review is surprisingly good. There is only one link to follow, and that is to a PDF containing an overview of carotid stent placement for carotid artery stenosis. This document was prepared by NICE as part of a consultation exercise assessing the safety and efficacy of CAS. It contains basic information about CAS, its alternatives and a review of those trials published so far comparing the two. Most of the data are lifted directly from a Cochrane Review on the same, but it is all put together in a 'no-frills' document free from any sort of commercial bias, which is rather refreshing.***

www.angioplasty.org

This website has the look of a tabloid newspaper, but the contents of a broadsheet. Again, it is an American production, but if you can see past the glitz and interactive features there is a wealth of useful information here for patients and medics alike. Physicians are kept up-to-date with trials, while patients have a forum to discuss all things to do with angioplasty (coronary and peripheral interventions alongside CAS). There are interviews with world-leading experts, some of them available to download as video files. There are many links to follow, even if those of a commercial bias are ignored.****

www.guidant.com

In terms of overall look and user-friendliness, this website rates highest. Again, it is commercially biased; however, looking beyond that, it has many useful features and resources. When explaining this procedure to patients there is now no need to draw it on the back of a piece of paper – this site has very good looking animations that do exactly that. There is a 'PowerPoint Resource Center' that allows doctors to download pictures and diagrams that can be included in talks, which is very useful. There is also a patient-friendly side to the site, allowing information sheets to be downloaded. The information is pitched at the right level and appears unbiased in its attitude to CEA.****