STEP™ combines printed modules with online support via the eSTEP™ website and also provides additional benefits including: (i) *Surgery* journal subscription (24 months); (ii) discounts on textbooks via Blackwell's online bookshop; (iii) an event at the RCSE (STEP™ College Day); and (iv) discounts on the RCSE's Intercollegiate MRCS examination preparatory courses.

Bearing in mind the results of the survey, the team is actively involved in producing a new edition of STEP™ (including an updated version of the eSTEP™ website) for release later in 2008. STEP™ will provide the surgical trainee with a distance learning resource combining the didactic elements as well as a complementary interactive website. The latter will allow peer-led discussions as well as a conduit for rapid responses to changes in the surgical trainees' environment. With this programme, the surgical trainee will have access to an up-to-date resource that will be responsive to the inevitable changes in surgical training.

*Computers are incredibly fast, accurate, and stupid.
Human beings are incredibly slow, inaccurate, and brilliant.
Together they are powerful beyond imagination.*

Albert Einstein, 1879–1955

Cosmetic surgery: information for patients

S TADIPARTHI¹, K SHOKROLLAHI²

¹Department of Plastic Surgery, University Hospital North Durham, North Road, Durham DH1 5TW, UK

²Welsh Centre for Burns and Plastic Surgery, Morriston Hospital, Swansea SA6 6NL, UK

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/CosmeticSurgery/fs/en>

This Department of Health website provides unbiased information for patients considering surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures. A comprehensive A-to-Z list of cosmetic procedures is provided, including abdominoplasty, breast augmentation and reduction, liposuction, face-lifts, Botox and dermal fillers. Procedures are listed under both technical and the more commonly used names (*e.g.* 'nose job' for rhinoplasty), along with details of the aims of surgery, details of the procedure itself, postoperative care, and results. There is also a checklist of essential questions the patient should ask in order to make an informed decision when considering these procedures. Although there are no photographs or illustrations for patients who want to see the scars or postoperative results, there are useful links to other websites on cosmetic surgery. There is also guidance for patients unhappy with their treatment with regulatory contact details of various regulatory bodies including the Health Care Commission, General Medical Council and Advertising Standards Authority.****

http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk/nationalfindings/nationalthemedreports/independenthealth/privatehealthreports.cfm?cit_id=510

This Health Care Commission report from the Chief Medical Officer summarises the findings of an investigation into private cosmetic surgery in England. It examines the extent of compliance with standards by institutions undertaking cosmetic surgery over the last 2 years, provides an idea of the numbers and types of procedures undertaken, and an analysis of complaints received. Areas in need of improvement are highlighted, along with necessary recommendations for change. This information is aimed mainly at clinicians, providing interesting reading on the provision of cosmetic surgery in England. No information on individual clinics or surgeons are provided.***

<http://www.asgbi.org.uk/pdfs/advice.pdf>

This document provided by the Cosmetic Surgery Interspeciality Committee of the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland gives an excellent overview of issues for patients to consider with regards to cosmetic surgery. Similar to the Department of Health website, it provides details on how to find out more on institutions offering procedures, and how to make a complaint if required. Although there is no information on each procedure, it does have important links to various regulatory bodies and Colleges, along with their contact details.****

<http://www.baaps.org.uk/content/view/17/31/>

<http://www.baaps.org.uk/content/category/1/16/60/>

The official website of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) provides unbiased, educational resources to the public for the commonest cosmetic procedures. Variations on each procedure are also described. There are some illustrations to help patients understand the procedures, scarring and the results they should expect. There is a useful feature on the website that assists in finding a surgeon who is a BAAPS member in a particular region and provides their contact details. This site along with e-medicine and ASPS sites are probably the most useful for trainees who wish to gather more information on aesthetic surgery. Yearly press releases are published on the website that show the type and number of cosmetic procedures performed in the private sector by surgeons who are BAAPS members.****

<http://www.surgery.org/public/index.php>

The official site for the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) gives systematic, detailed information on 19 of the main surgical and non-surgical aesthetic procedures. The details are given in a Q&A-type format using non-technical language. It covers everything from what to expect from the consultation, the surgery

itself, as well as its complications. There is also a gallery with pre- and postoperative photographs giving patients an idea of the type of results to expect. The site enables patients to find a 'reputable' surgeon who is a member of ASAPS, there is little to guide patients on how to choose the appropriate surgeon or what to do if there are problems.***

http://www.plasticsurgery.org/patients_consumers/procedures/CosmeticPlasticSurgery.cfm

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) site gives a balanced, informative and objective account of aesthetic surgery procedures for both patients and trainees. The list of procedures is more comprehensive than the BAAPS website and also has an extensive photo gallery with before and after pictures as well as illustrations that enable the patient to understand the technique and the results they can expect. The site also gives interesting personal accounts from patients who have undergone cosmetic surgery and allows patients to post their experience of the procedure. These accounts are of satisfied patients only, and may offer biased views for those considering surgery. There are statistics on the average cost of each procedure, number of operations performed each year and the amount spent on aesthetic surgery by Americans each year – a truly interesting read!****

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

The Hurlingham Clinic is a prestigious private clinic based in London. The site is well laid out giving quite detailed

information on an extensive range of procedures in comparison to the other websites. The information is slightly biased with limited detail on the complications of some procedures. It includes some diagrams, as well as before-and-after photographs of patients who have undergone surgery at the clinic, enabling future patients to see the final results. There are personal comments from patients who have had various procedures at the clinic good postoperative outcomes.****

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cosmetic-surgery/SN00006>

Useful information from the Mayo Clinic helps patients understand the benefits, risks and limitations of surgery enabling them to make the best choice. Some procedures, such as rhinoplasty, breast augmentation and reduction are considered individually with more details on the pre-operative preparation, the procedure, postoperative instructions, results and complications. This is a patient-oriented site, with limited content but with good links to various American colleges that can provide more extensive data.***

http://www.medem.com/medlb/sub_detaillb.cfm?parent_id=95&act=disp

Medem is an American-based site with objective information supported by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. There is clear and useful information on both surgical and non-surgical aesthetic, as well as reconstructive, procedures. The range of cosmetic procedures is slightly limited and no photographs are shown, there are, however, some illustrations.***