

ON THE NET

Build a simple Web site for your practice in less than an hour

Fifteen percent of respondents to a recent nonrandomized Internet survey conducted by the CMA said their practices have a Web site.

Upon reading that, I couldn't help but wonder if many physicians are wary of Internet publishing because it is perceived as being difficult, time consuming or too expensive. In fact, it is none of those things. With some simple Web-authoring tools, creating your own site can be relatively fast, easy and free. The writing and formatting of my site (www.members.home.net/mgreiver/index.htm) took half an hour, while registering and getting set up with

my service provider took another hour.

I created my site because I wanted to make some basic facts about my practice, such as hours available for appointments, parking information and practice location, easily available for my patients. And since I see patients arriving with health information hot off the Internet, I included links to a few high-quality health-information Web sites.

I wrote my home page using Netscape Composer. To access the program, load Netscape and click on Communicator from the top menu, then Composer. When the page is open, start typing the information you would like to offer your patients. Want to link to another site? Click on the "link" button on top, then type the link's name and address on the screen that pops up. There is a button on the top for images, but adding pictures will slow the speed at which your page loads for visitors.

If you don't have Netscape, there is an authoring program with Windows 98, FrontPage Express (www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/internet/Articles/003Mar/FPEXpress.asp). For those who would like to develop fancier home pages, programs such as FrontPage 2000 (www.microsoft.com/frontpage/) are available.

Once you are satisfied with the way your home page looks, you have to pub-

lish it so patients can access it. Many Internet service providers (ISPs) provide this hosting service at no charge. There are also free hosts — visit www.how-to-do-it.com/Users/WebMarketing/Freehosting.htm — but they will usually include some advertising on your page. You may need to register with your ISP to obtain the Web space and you will have to obtain the address from which to post your page.

Once you are ready, hit the "publish" button on the top menu, or go to file, then publish. A pop-up screen appears, and you can then enter a name for your page, such as "Dr. Smith's Practice," and a name for the file, "practice.htm". There is a space for the address as well as your password. Once this is entered, click "OK" and your file will be published. Then save your file in a convenient location (I have a folder on my desktop called Internet Pages). If you need to change your page, just load the file into Composer, then republish it after the changes have been made.

I include the address for my page on my letterhead and business cards. I also direct my patients there if I want them to seek information on the Web.

Not only is the creation of a Web page well within the reach of most physicians, the move may help us extend the patient education we provide from our office to the Internet. — *Michelle Greiver, Toronto*



Courtesy Michelle Greiver

Dr. Michelle Greiver: MDs' Web sites can promote patient education

World Wide Web nets study subjects for Alberta islet cell researchers

The Internet is opening up new vistas for scientists searching for study subjects, Canadian researchers are discovering. Dr. James Shapiro, a member of the Alberta team that gained international recognition because of its islet cell transplantation research, says the team has been bombarded by requests from patients who want to be enrolled in the study (*CMAJ* 2001;164[2]:255).

"The Internet has brought many thousands of requests from across the world," says Shapiro, director of the Clinical Islet

Transplant Program at the University of Alberta. The flood started after the researchers invited potential participants to self-refer to their program (www.med.ualberta.ca/research/groups/islet/cand.html); physicians also can refer patients.

"We are fortunate," he adds, "because we are heading up an international multicentre trial and have been able to pass many of these requests on to the central immune tolerance network site [email: islet-info@immunetolerance.org]."

Many of the requests to join the

study have come from the US, but Shapiro says the team has decided that "unless we are able to access cadaveric pancreata from the US, we should confine our program to Canadian recipients." He says this is done "to avoid conflicts" with a donation process built upon the good will of Canadian donors.

As for the self-referral process, Shapiro considers it a success. "We have accepted and are working up several patients who self-referred through our Web site." — *Patrick Sullivan, CMAJ*