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ON THE NET

Occupational health finds a home on the Net

Primary care physicians are often the first contact patients with occupational and environmental health concerns have with the health care system. Focus groups have indicated that many doctors feel incapable of dealing properly with these problems because of inadequate training and other issues, such as a lack of knowledge about available resources. Participants said doctors want or need to know more about:

- the physician's role in return-to-work issues;
- how to recognize occupational diseases;
- specific substances with which a patient may be working.

One recent online offering is from the Physician Education Project in Workplace Health of the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (**www.wsib.on.ca**), which offers a manual, *Injury/Illness and Return to Work/Function: a Practical Guide for Physicians*. Information on specific conditions is also available.

Backguide (**www.backguide.com/**), developed by the Institute for Work & Health (IWH), is a useful resource for physicians who treat low back pain. The IWH site (**www.iwh.on.ca**) also provides clinicians with the institute's latest research into the prevention and treatment of work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

Asthma is another common occupational illness, and the American Lung Association has a site devoted to the topic (**www.lungusa.org/asthma/astoccasthm.html**), as does Dr. Raymond Agius (**www.agius.com/hew/resource/ocasthma.htm**).

Doctors hoping to improve recognition of work-related disease should try using the simple, 5-question test (WHACS) developed by the Medical University of South Carolina (**www.musc.edu/oem/ofrmset.html**).

Data on toxicity or adverse effects of specific substances can be found at TOXNET (**toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/**), while useful fact sheets are available at **www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html**. Also check out the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (**www.ccohs.ca**, go to OSH Answers).

For those seeking educational resources, try **www.agius.com**, which contains a variety of educational material and describes both the effect of work on health (occupational asthma) and the effect of health on work (arthritis in a sculptor). It also includes a clinical case study of occupational asthma (**www.agius.com/hew/clin/1a.htm**). Other curricular materials and case studies can be viewed at **www.secondnature.org** or **www.ceem.org/niehs**.

Two excellent environmental health case studies are available at **medstat.med.utah.edu/envirodx**; large collections of links to further resources can be reached from the Occupational and Environmental Medicine Association of Canada site at **www.oemac.org/links.htm** and at a US site, **www.occenvmed.net**.

Those wishing to subscribe to an email list dealing with occupational/environmental health topics can subscribe to the "Duke University list" at **archive.occhealthnews.com**. — *Gary Liss*, Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto, and coordinator, Physician Education Project in Workplace Health; *Lily Cheung*, corporate medical director, Stelco