

Information Technology and Health Care

Pages with reference to book, From 85 To 86

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Information Technology (IT) has given a new dimension to every part of our lives. From online publications to online shopping, the World Wide Web has changed the way we work. Health Sciences is not an exception. In today's world of rapid technological advancements in every field, it seems impossible to keep abreast with the latest developments. As we are more concerned with medicine and health, it is appropriate to mention that every minute a new drug is made and tested, every day a different approach to cure and prevention discovered. It has become nearly impossible for a person in this part of the globe to find out the latest on the other side and vice versa. Journals published weekly or monthly are very helpful in keeping the knowledge of health practitioners up to date, but the major drawback is that they are not available everywhere and if they are, it is a little cumbersome to locate the exact piece of information. Even if one does that we may only find a limited number of journals available. However, if we have access to the internet, we just need to go to a good search engine, type in the keywords for the information required, and with the click of a mouse button we can relax and in a moment have a number of resources around the world there in front of us. It is not just the US or Europe or Asia, it is the entire globe. Say for example you need to know the recent update on the Ebola virus status in Africa, you are desperately searching the newspapers and infectious diseases journals, which unfortunately are a month old whereas the outbreak began only a week ago. What will you do? Give thanks for having an Internet connection. You dial up the local ISP (Internet Service Provider), log on to the Internet, go to a search engine, type "EBOLA OUTBREAK", and the next minute you see the latest information on your desktop. Want the same thing in a fancy way? Go to the CNN website at cnn.com and get the last minute update. You need to tell your patient something you could not on the consultation last week. All you need to do is to e-mail him the instructions. If any patient needs an expert advice and the doctor is not available in his place of residence, no problem. Use NetMeeting and he can discuss at length about his health status. Though in our country, the major part of our people do not have access to the Internet, the day is not far when every home will have a computer online. After all, there was a time, a few years ago, when television was only a luxury for rich people. Now you find antennas on every rooftop all over the country.

The recent developments in IT have made it possible to use "push technology" for your ease. Just program your browser (the program used to surf the World Wide Web) for the information you would like when you are having your bed tea every morning. Your computer wakes up before you do, logs on the net, goes to the specified places, downloads the information you are interested in, and sleeps again. You get up in the morning, turn on the computer and the morning newspaper is there. If I keep on advocating the Internet, these lines will probably fill up the whole journal. To cut it short, Information Technology is the future.

The most recent and state of the art technology related to medicine is TeleMedicine. In fact some professionals say that TeleMedicine is the future of Medicine. The top line consultants around the world are available in front of you. Currently this technology is very expensive but with the integration of the Internet and real time video on existing telecom backbones, it is not far when you will not need to go physically to a doctor again. TeleRadiology is currently used in the United States, where a big hospital hosts the top of the line classified Radiologists who receive X-ray's, CT's and MRI's on their desktops and write a report there and then. TelePathology is also currently used in the Middle East and Australia. Recently, cardiothoracic surgery was conducted in Cleveland (USA) and broadcasted intraactively around the world including The Aga Khan University, which also included a question and

answer session for the participants. This is just a brief overview of information technology (IT). In future columns we will review medical information web sites on the Internet, which are useful for health professionals. But before you get the next issue, you can always trust Yahoo for the information you need. Just type <http://www.yahoo.com> in the web browser you have and you are on the information super highway.