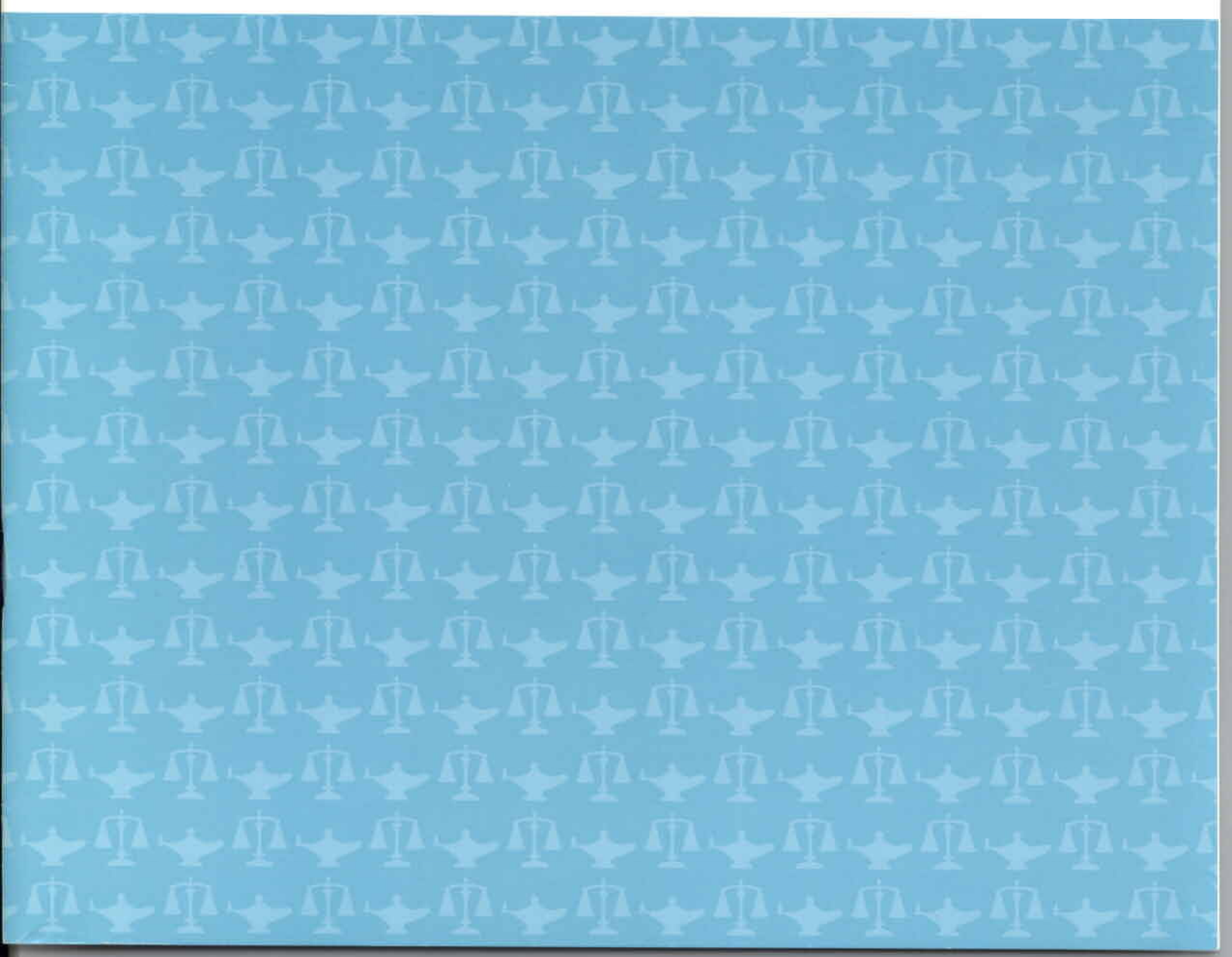


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Medical Literature Research 2000: Part 2

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Part 1 of "Medical Literature 2000" addressed the importance of analyzing scientific studies and their methodology and suggested that critical thinking skills (e.g., data analysis, determining the applicability of the information, and assessing outcomes) are essential for interpreting such data. The responsibility of assessing the validity (as discussed in Part 1) is still up to the user and may be harder to discern. Legal Nurse Consultants (LNCs) collectively are adept at gaining access, interpreting, and using Internet information. Internet research provides data on case studies, medical diagnoses, future medical prognosis, and projected costs. In addition, it supplies invaluable peer communication and can even "promote" your business. Not only are LNCs gaining access to this information, but in many instances their clients are as well. Advances in information technology may translate into LNCs working with better-informed clients, but it may be more necessary than ever to help them distinguish between valid studies and "junk" science.

"Surfing" the Web

Before the Internet "arrived" in offices and homes, the only method available to LNCs for conducting research was to spend large blocks of time at the local medical or legal library. *The Indexicus Medicus* was the most common starting point. You would identify the key words, figure out which articles you wanted, walk through the many aisles of the library, and hope that no one else had the item you were searching for. Now, with the powerful search tools (engines) available, the Internet is the first place to go for information. You still search using key words and/or phrases, but now you can search multiple medical libraries, journals, dictionaries, and databases without having to worry about someone else having your article "checked out." You can peruse an abstract of an article or review its full text. If you want a hard (paper) copy, you can, in most instances, request it from the source.

Tips for productive searches

Think of search engines as your guide to the Internet because that is just what they are, indexes of the World Wide Web. (You can find a complete list of search engines at <http://net.gurus.com/search/>.) The following tips should assist in improving your results:

- Place quotation marks around your query; this will provide Web sites containing those words together, in the specific order you have listed.
- Be specific. If possible, use more than one word. The more explicit you are, the greater the likelihood of finding the desired sites.
- Use AND or the plus (+) sign between key words. This will locate *everything* with the designated key words in

the title. If you use the plus sign, put it directly in front of the word(s) added; do not use spaces between words.

- Use AND, NOT, or the minus (-) sign to limit articles. Do not use spaces.
- Click on "More Like This" to hook onto the link that is the closest match.
- If all else fails, use the asterisk (*) as the wild card. This will search for variant spellings of key words or phrases.

Example

A broad-based search for "spinal cord injury" resulted in 305 "hits." The search was narrowed to "spinal cord injury costs" resulting in 37 hits. Finally, the search was narrowed to "spinal cord injury rehabilitation costs" and returned 11 sites. Included in the 305 original sites was the University of Alabama, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Web site (<http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/>). This site included professional and consumer information as well as links to hundreds of other Web sites dealing with spinal cord injury issues.

Is it any good?

When determining the value of research results, the points addressed in Part 1 are equally applicable to the results of an Internet search. It is imperative that you know where the information originated. Consider the database, the Web site, or the dictionary from which your material was derived. Did the information come from the Mayo Clinic Web site (<http://www.mayo.edu/>), the Johns Hopkins Medical Information site (<http://www.intelihealth.com/>), or from a Web site prepared by laypersons or consumers? Although incidental reports from patients can be extremely helpful, they cannot be considered expert or authoritative. There are thousands of "legitimate" sources for medical-legal research, but just as many less-than-credible sources. Know who put the site together, and if you cannot confirm your source, do not use it. You cannot take everything on the Internet at face value.

The following list contains just a few of the Web sites you might want to visit when conducting your next search:

- <http://www.healthatoz.com>—listings include everything from allied health to women's health
- <http://hsinfo.ghsl.nwu.edu/healthweb>—medical libraries from around the world developed this site
- <http://www.medscape.com>—a medical information site created by medical professionals
- www.fda.gov—The Food and Drug Administration
- www.oirm.nih.gov/—The National Institutes of Health

- <http://www.cancer.org/>—The American Cancer Society
- <http://www.amhrt.org/>—The American Health Association
- <http://www.ahcpr.gov/>—The Agency for Health Care Policy & Research

Business opportunities

When looking for an expert to provide review and testimony, the Internet has provided us with an ideal means of communication. At any given time on the Web site of the Association of Legal Nurse Consultants you will find messages “in search of” nurses, physicians, pharmacists, etc., to serve as expert witnesses. I recently found a certified ostomy and wound care nurse on the Web site of Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurses Society (<http://www.wocn.org/>). A short biography was provided outlining her credentials, along with contact information. Similarly, other organizations offer listings of qualified experts and contact information. It is also possible to obtain feedback from others who have used an expert to determine whether he or she is the person who will best fit your needs.

Conclusion

Most LNCs have experienced the frustration of an attempted

literature/medical Web search; sometimes it seems more cost-effective to physically go to the library, as opposed to fruitlessly surfing the Web. There is a definite learning curve to this process that does not come easy but will come with time and experience. Once you learn to use the Internet to conduct your research, you will find it to be the most valuable tool you have—literally—at your fingertips.

Resources

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