Joining the information age

Information is the essence of a profession. The creation of a unique body of information and its dissemination to others in the field is what makes one profession different from others. For those in the relatively young field of injury control, the creation and dissemination of information on the causes and prevention of injury has taken a giant leap forward with the creation of this new journal, Injury Prevention, the official organ of the International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention (ISCAIP).

The journal received a wonderful launch on 9 March 1995 at a conference 'Injury Prevention — What Works?', held in London. Attended by more than 200 people, the conference showcased the advances that have been made in injury prevention over the last decade, and the contributions to this progress made by professionals in a variety of disciplines. Michael Peckham and Jean Athey discussed the role of government in the UK and the US, respectively, in recognizing the importance of injuries to child health and raising prevention of injuries to a higher priority in both the research and delivery arms of their national health programs. Fred Rivara and Terry Nolan provided examples of the central role of epidemiology in injury prevention, from the surveillance and identification of a problem, to investigation of its causes and possible preventive strategies, to the evaluation of the impact of intervention programs. Sue Gallagher and Liz Towner demonstrated that health education, when focused on a specific problem and performed correctly, can be powerful tools for decreasing injury incidence and severity. The important role of engineering and regulation in creating safe products and environments, for ourselves and our children, was emphasized by Andy Benson, Wim Rogmans, and Barbara Sabey. Barry Pless was able to help us understand the critical role for the journal, Injury Prevention, as the field develops and matures; with his hand at the helm, I am sure the journal will be a central force in decreasing childhood morbidity and mortality from injury.

In the last half of the last decade of the 20th century, print is only one of many media we use to disseminate information and shape our profession. An increasingly important part of our lives in recent years is electronic technology. The use of personal computers for word processing, writing papers, conducting statistical analyses, and managing data is occurring to a degree unimaginable just a few years ago. We struggle to keep up with the lightning changes in hardware and software, and adapt them to our own needs. And of course, we realize that when we get stuck on something, we can always turn to the closest computer consultants — our 12 year old kids!

One of the most rapidly growing uses of technology is in telecommunications — electronic mail and the Internet. Begun 20 years ago by the US Department of Defense, the Internet has become the electronic information highway linking people around the world and, ironically, becoming one of the most important peace bridges in existence. Fortunately for us as injury control professionals, there is an increasing amount of information available about injury topics on the Internet. This information is being updated almost daily, and by time this article appears in print it will surely be outdated. Nevertheless, several useful sources of information about injuries are now available.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail how to access Internet or how to use the various software available. Many of us can connect to the Internet through our universities, agencies, and companies. There are also a wide variety of commercial providers of Internet access; most have a monthly fee and an hourly charge for the connection. The World Wide Web (WWW) is the newest information service to arrive on the Internet. WWW is based on a technology called hypertext. Software to use the WWW are called browsers; the most common line oriented browser is Lynx. More advanced, graphical browsers are Mosaic and Netscape. Information on these, and further information on software is available from many sources, including a number of fairly readable books.1,2

Here is a brief list of the main major entry points into the Internet for those interested in child and adolescent injury prevention:

**International Society of Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention (ISCAIP)** — Information about the ISCAIP is available both through WWW and for non-WWW users. The address on the WWW is http://weber.u.washington.edu:80/hiprc/iscaip.html. This can be accessed using both hypertext programs such as Mosaic or Netscape, as well as non-hypertext programs such as Lynx. The address for the latter is ftp.u.washington.edu/public/iscaip. This contains information about ISCAIP, a membership application, member mailing list and Injury Prevention information for authors. Any additions to this would be most welcome.

**Injury Control Resource Information Network (ICRIN)** — The University of Pittsburgh has developed an on-line index to Internet injury control resources. It is intended as a starting point for multiple injury resources and opportunities on the Internet. It can be reached through the ISCAIP information on Mosaic, as described above, or can be accessed directly at http://info.pitt.edu/~hweiss/injury.htm.

**Listservs** — These are topical areas one subscribes to (for free) and then members are automatically sent electronic mail communications on information in that area. There are literally thousands of these Listservers; the ICRIN lists 10 of the most useful of these for injury professionals.

**Research information** — There are many wonderful free things on the Internet, including statistical software like Epi-Info. This can be obtained from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pup/Software/epi. Also available at this source is mapping software for showing geographic patterns of injury rates.

Have fun surfing the Net. Remember, if you get stuck, ask any 12 year old for help!

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