

PHYSIOTHERAPY ON THE INTERNET

by Larry Ian Cohen

Introduction

The number of computer users throughout the world is increasing rapidly, as are the number of functions that the computers are able to perform. The linking of computers is termed networking and can involve a local area network (LAN), a larger metropolitan area network (MAN) and even a wide area network (WAN). When computers are networked users can "talk" to others, send messages and share files and programs, and is the principle of the Internet, a global internet-



working of computer systems.

The exact number of users on the Internet is increasing exponentially but current estimates place usage at 34,000 networks, 5 million computers and 20 million users¹. The main key feature of the Internet is that it allows heterogeneous computers to communicate with each other using a "common language", transmission control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP)². This allows Apple computers, IBM machines, various mainframes and supercomputers to communicate with one another.

Electronic mail (e-mail)

The most basic use of the Internet involves electronic mail (e-mail) whereby user x at computer a is able to send a message to user y at computer b. Computer b could be in the room next door or halfway across the world, and the time it takes for messages to travel across the network can be measured in seconds. Like ordinary mail (snail mail), e-mail requires an Internet address so that it can reach its destination. Internet addresses follow a logical pattern³:

person@machine.sitename.sitetype.country

(eg: 057larry@witsvma.wits.ac.za)

where:

- person is the userid of the person on the network eg. 057larry
- machine is the computer's name on the internet eg. witsvma
- sitename is the name of the institution

eg. wits

- sitetype is the type of institution eg ac (academic)
- country eg. za (South Africa)

Mailing lists are a slight variation on e-mail. They allow users with similar interests to subscribe to a list. Mail is forwarded to all the members of the list who can then decide whether to act, store, or discard the message.

You may be wondering what this has to do with physiotherapy, well the good news is that physiotherapists now have their own mailing list (PHYSIO) which is based in the UK. PHYSIO aims to provide a global forum for everybody interested in physiotherapy, namely undergraduate students, researchers, educators, clinicians and administrators.

How to subscribe to PHYSIO:

You need a computer that is connected to the Internet, via a direct link or via a modem. There are commercial bulletin boards in South Africa that act as gateways onto the Internet. Members of the public can subscribe to the bulletin boards for a nominal annual fee. Once you are able to connect to the Internet and have a personal Internet address, send a message to:

mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk

with the following instruction in the body of the message:

- join physio firstname lastname (eg. join physio John Doe)

The mailbase system automatically

adds your name to the PHYSIO list and sends you back instructions on how to use the system. To send messages to the members of PHYSIO, send to PHYSIO (the list - not mailbase) at the address: physio@mailbase.ac.uk

Not only does PHYSIO act as a tool to communicate with other physiotherapists, PHYSIO also acts as a document server. Documents related to physiotherapy (eg. Queen Margaret College's BSc Physiotherapy course document) are kept in the mailbase system, and are retrievable through PHYSIO. All this is covered in the Instructions that are sent after adding your name to PHYSIO. There are also countless other mailing lists to subscribe to, such as vegetarian food recipes, running, astronomy, jokes - the list is endless.

Other applications of the Internet

The Internet carries a vast number of information databases and programs that can be accessed on-line or retrieved to read or run on your own computer. There are tools to assist you in finding the information (and location) you are interested in⁴. Instruction in the use of these tools extends beyond the scope of this article but the following is a short introduction to the

options available. The first is a program called ARCHIE which is able to search through files indexed on the Internet using keywords supplied by you. Once a file is found it can be transferred to your computer using the file transfer procedure (FTP).

The process of telnetting or remotely logging onto a distant computer allows you to gain access to numerous types of databases, including libraries and other public or government services throughout the world. Other systems to assist in searching for information are the gopher, wide area information server (WAIS) and the world wide web (WWW). These methods allow you to read the information on-line (at the documents source) through a series of easy-to-use menu's. This saves you from having to transfer the information to your computer in order to read it.

This article has hopefully shown you some more applications for computers. South Africa has been isolated for so long, its about time we

physiotherapists joined our colleagues in the global village.

References

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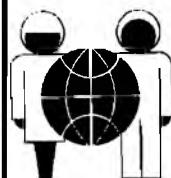
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