INNOVATIVE INFORMATION PORTALS

Molecular Biology and Clinical Resources

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PURPOSE

Libraries provide medical students and faculty with a wide array of resources to locate information. Students are often confused about or unaware of the information sources available to them. Clinicians and investigators cite time pressures, competing demands, and overly complex search tools as barriers that discourage them from using current information resources. Existing information resources have powerful search and retrieval capabilities but are dependent on the users’ knowledge and skills.

METHODS

To help students and faculty more efficiently find the information they need, tab-based search portals were developed to provide easy access to many resources through a single, intuitive search interface. An inter-disciplinary health sciences library team matched technology to appropriate resources to develop these innovative portals. Resources selected included proprietary licensed information tools and freely available Web sites with open URL architecture. A key strength of these portals is that search results are organized “on the fly” into meaningful categories using clustering technology from Vivisimo, Inc. and are directly accessible from the portal. During the development process, usability tests provided a pre-launch opportunity to fine-tune the user interface and further refine the selection of resources.

RESULTS

Two new information portals were developed. The focal point of both portals is a search box with subject tabs to provide quick access to designated full-text information resources. Each subject tab offers a federated search of a different pool of resources. search.HSLS.MolBio focuses on molecular biology resources of utility to investigators across a range of disciplines. Subject tabs included in the Molecular Biology portal are Databases & Software; Articles on Databases & Software; Genes/Proteins; Pathways; Protocols and Recommended Articles. search.HSLS.clinical-e is valuable to clinicians at the point of care. The Clinical Resource portal includes Diagnosis, Diseases, Drugs, Evidence-Based Medicine, and Patient Education. The adaptability of the system permits expansion of subject areas and ongoing revision of the targeted resources.

CONCLUSIONS

Health science library users have quickly embraced these new approaches to accessing information. search.HSLS.MolBio currently receives approximately 3,000 hits each day. This portal launch has also stimulated an increase in attendance at library training workshops on using online molecular biology resources. Within the UPMC Health System, the search.HSLS.clinical-e portal has been embedded in the electronic health record systems for easy access by all clinicians. As clinician use broadens, the spectrum of resources will be evolving to continue to meet patient care needs. This new approach to gaining quick access to vital and timely information can readily be adapted to other specialties and settings, such as dental medicine, nursing, or consumer health.

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