# COMPUTERISED MEDICAL INFORMATION

### An "Information Culture"

Parallel with the "Information Explosion" is the recent advance in "Information Technology". If the examples of the developed countries, such as USA, Europe and Japan, are good indication of the trend in an "Information Society", then the printed media will be superseded by other machine-readable forms sooner than one could expect.

If not the next five years, then towards the end of this decade, one would see the rapid disappearance of printed media which most professionals presently rely upon.

### Implications for Singaporeans

For example, some of the usual journals/magazines that you are accustomed to subscribing will cease being published anymore. Even some of the major libraries around might become too uneconomical to maintain and forced to discontinue. Where then can you get your regular supply of medical information?

In place would be Information that is obtainable from large computers. Most of these databanks would be located overseas. Singapore being a small, albeit sophisticated, country will have to totally rely on such external systems. Unless she keeps in phase with such developments happening abroad, there would soon be a cut-off point in the availability of traditionally published information.

### The Information Centre

In anticipation of things to come, certain measures are vitally necessary. One of these led to the establishment of the Centre of Information Resource & Technology, Singapore. This centre will catalyse the introduction of concepts and practices that are relevant to the times. It will operate, as a matter of priority, a computerised Information Service for the Medical Profession.

### Medical Information Service

The Medical Information Service is conceived as a kind of essential public service. The belief is that what is good for the Medical Professional will ultimately also benefit the general public.

The Service should serve three basic functions. Its **Current Medical Service** would strive to keep Medical Practitioners continually abreast of developments within their specific field of specialty. This is necessary to maintain the high standard of professional knowledge and practice — in line with efforts to make Singapore the "Brain Services Centre" of the region.

It would also act as a centre of reference for both practitioners and researchers. Its **Medical Enquiry Service,** for instance, can answer questions within a matter of 48 hours.

Medical practictioners who need certain articles/documents/reports can also request them from this Centre. This is provided for under its **Article Retrieval Service.**

### How the System Works

The Centre possesses a computer terminal that links up with over 200 databases all over the world. It can interact "on-line" with these overseas giant computers, as though they are located here.

The computers are constantly fed with both published and unpublished information that originate from anywhere in the world. For Medicine alone, they scan through

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over 8,000 prestigeous medical journals that are published in 110 countries. Familiar sources include the National Library of Medicine of the US and the Exerpta Medica in Europe. The number of records available from such databases exceeds five million! And this is increasing at a rate of at least 40,000 per month!

Through this terminal, the computers can be instructed to continually scan through those journals and capture only the latest (available in that month) information pertaining to the subject/topic of your choice. These will then be printed out periodically from the terminal. This system therefore offers the ultimate replacement for subscribing to expensive journals which are often marginally useful and time-consuming to read.

**Creating Your Own Personal Reference Database**

Through the **Current Medical Information Service,** you can actually build up your own personal Medical Reference Database. Each monthly Report that you receive would contain about 22 Nos. records pertaining to subject of your interest/specialty. Each consists of the title, author, source, ABSTRACT and so on. In this way, you obtain the latest information available that is truly relevant to your specific need.

The selective accumulation of such reference information amounts to the creation of a specialised database that is within your immediate reach, both cost-wise as well as location-wise. And whether this is still possible at an economical subscription rate, would depend on the support given to this effort by your PROFESSION.

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