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Distributing Anesthesia Information Via the Web: Lessons Learned by the Closed Claims Project

John Campos, M.A.

Last year, the Closed Claims Project published an article in the *ASA NEWSLETTER*¹ describing the basic structure of our Web site <depts.washington.edu/asaccp>. Apparently, the article received great attention. The monthly number of visits to our Web site has more than doubled since June 1998. One consequence of this increase in visits has been an increase in data requests.

How We Deal With Increased Requests

Because our Web site lists telephone numbers, postal addresses and e-mail addresses, people who view the available abstracts and full text *NEWSLETTER* articles have been able to contact us easily. The Project Manager, Karen Posner, Ph.D., has noted an upswing in data requests. While many individuals simply want a copy of an article listed in the Project's bibliography, an increasing number want data on topics not covered by Closed Claims Project publications.

Because the ASA funds the Closed Claims Project under the oversight of the Committee on Professional Liability, the Project is happy to provide free, but limited, data analysis services to ASA members. The committee has adopted guidelines for responding to data requests. These guidelines include a questionnaire that provides focus for data extraction and allows the Project staff to respond to requests quickly and efficiently. This questionnaire is available on the Web site in Adobe Acrobat format.

The Public Is Our Web Audience

Although we maintain our Web site as a service to ASA members, the topics have been of interest to physicians in other specialties as well as nonphysicians. Many people, including lawyers, medical device manufacturers and patients have contacted our project offices, looking for legal or medical advice. This has posed some concerns to our staff: to what extent do we offer consultation?

Our position is that the Project is a tool of scientific research for ASA, not for the general public. We advise nonphysicians that the specific goal of the Closed Claims Project is to identify major areas of liability in anesthesia practice and to discuss promising strategies for prevention of patient injury. When nonphysicians seek data or consultation from the Closed Claims Project, we suggest that they examine our publications in the peer-reviewed literature to see if their questions can be answered by our existing research.

The adoption of these policies has not led to tension with the public. The public now has so much more access to medical education materials via the World Wide Web that our lack of a consultative service is not a problem.

Medical Education and the Web

The impact of the Web on medical education cannot be overemphasized. It can provide medical staff and the public with up-to-the-minute information and research data. It can also provide the public with quick links to their physicians and care centers.

Many hospitals and Internet health information services are now providing free medical consultation, access to MEDLINE and health tips on anything from apnea to viral hepatitis. Some allow the user to

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make clinic appointments via e-mail or Web entry-forms.

People seeking to establish a Web presence for themselves, their businesses or their projects will find the task easier this year. Many companies are setting up services that automatically create a Web site for you, either for free or for a leasing fee. Others provide free public chat rooms on medical topics. Free e-mail abounds! For those looking for a "virtual office," with on-line personal calendars, file sharing and office specific e-mail, there are Web sites for that, too. The range of services is constantly growing, as companies try to lure customers away from each other.

How to Reach the Closed Claims Project

Since 1995, the ASA Committee on Professional Liability's Closed Claims Project has maintained a Web site at the University of Washington. In February 1999, the Web site moved to a faster, more secure Web server at <depts.washington.edu/asaccp>. People going to the old Web site at <weber.u.washington.edu/~asaccp> will be automatically redirected to the new site.

The Closed Claims Project Web site can also be accessed through a link at the ASA Web site <www.asahq.org>. Questions and comments about the Closed Claims Project are always welcome. Please address these to Karen Posner, Ph.D., at <posner@u.washington.edu>. Technical questions or comments about the Web site should be addressed to the author at <asaccp@u.washington.edu>.

Reference:

- **Campos J.** Web site for Closed Claims Project provides access and insight. *ASA NEWSLETTER*. 1998; 62(6):15.

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