



How I use the internet

**Farooq Qureshi**

MBBS, MRCS, LRCP, FRCS, is a general practitioner and academic, Parklands Medical Practice, The University of Adelaide, South Australia. farooq.qureshi@adelaide.edu.au

Ms MC, aged 22 years, has come to ask my advice regarding the discontinuation of warfarin after an episode of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) 3 months ago. She is a hockey player and keen to cease her anticoagulant medication, but is concerned about the recurrence of DVT.

I know that d-dimer is increasingly being used in diagnosis of acute DVT. I wanted to find out if there was a study to assess the predictive value of d-dimer for recurrent venous thromboembolism (VTE) in subjects with a previous unprovoked event after the discontinuation of oral anticoagulant treatment, and whether it would be safe to discontinue warfarin for my patient.

I decide to conduct a quick, computerised literature search using the Yahoo! search engine for my query (www.yahoo.com). I chose Yahoo! because many patients are familiar with this search engine, and this allows them to be involved in decisions about their treatment.

Performing the search

In my web browser I enter www.yahoo.com. When the page has loaded, I enter the query 'can d-dimer levels predict recurrent venous thromboembolism?' in the Yahoo! web search field (Figure 1).

I chose to enter this query rather than simply entering 'd-dimer levels' or 'recurrent thromboembolism' to give me more precise and relevant information at the point of care. Entering key words would not help to construct a question and phrase it in such a way as to facilitate an answer. A meaningful search occurs when the following elements are framed as a query:

- consideration of patient characteristics
- intervention being considered
- comparison intervention (if any)
- outcome of clinical interest.¹

Analysing search results

Clicking on 'web search' yields 10 articles (hits) for my query (Figure 2). The first hit is an article from *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), a highly cited journal. I click on the title of the article and am taken to the JAMA website where I can view the article abstract (Figure 3).

Discussion

A first spontaneous VTE and a d-dimer level of less than 250 ng/mL (measured 3 weeks after ceasing anticoagulation therapy) signals low risk of recurrence. My patient was happy with the outcome of the search result.

I can save the article on my computer to read at a later date or email the article to my practice colleagues to ensure our approaches to conditions are broadly consistent with evidence based clinical practice. I can also print the abstract for my patient, thereby involving her in her own care and facilitating good risk management.

The time constraints of a consultation mean that information must be provided quickly, accurately and in a form that is easily understood by the patient. Using a search engine such as Yahoo! makes this task much easier.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

Reference

1. Schardt C, Mayer J. The well-built clinical question, 2004. Available at www.hsl.unc.edu/services/Tutorials/EBM/Question.htm.



Figure 1. Entering the query in the Yahoo! web search field

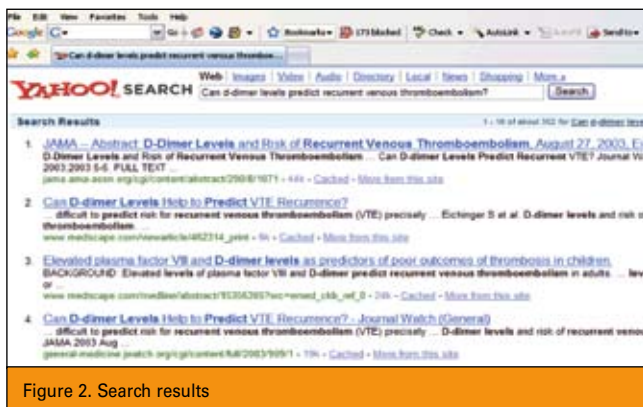


Figure 2. Search results



Figure 3. JAMA website