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Conflict of interest: none declared

Self-test questions

The following statements are either true or false (answers on page 23)

5. A high score in the Mini-Mental State Examination means the patient has probable dementia.
6. Memory is affected by mood.

Website review

Media Doctor website

www.mediadoctor.org.au

Mary Hemming, Chief Executive Officer, Therapeutic Guidelines, Melbourne

The reporting of new medical treatment in the lay media usually leaves much to be desired. So it is pleasing to see a website dedicated to improving the accuracy of such reporting.

The team behind Media Doctor consists of a group of academics and clinicians from the Newcastle Institute of Public Health. They have an interest in promoting better and more accurate reporting in the area of medical treatments.

Media Doctor reviews current news items about medical treatments, assesses their quality using a standardised rating scale, including criteria such as novelty of treatment, treatment options, disease mongering, evidence, and a quantification of benefits, harms and costs of treatment. The site presents reviews of good and bad examples of reports, the hope being that these independent and objective critiques will improve journalistic practices in reporting new medications and treatments.

Recently reviewed articles are listed on the home page and from each of the headings both the original article and the related review can be accessed. The site can be searched for articles by news source, intervention type, disease or specific words.

The site loads quickly, is easily navigable and each topic is clearly presented. However, there are several design elements that could be addressed that would improve the overall

readability. For example, on the home page it would be more intuitive for the overview of the site to be displayed on the left hand side of the page, with the list of recent topics on the right, or even on a separate page. Also, it is jarring for major headings to be in a smaller font than lower level headings. Finally, the menu headings are a bit too cryptic to indicate content – a 'tooltip' window that appears when you hover your mouse over each menu option would resolve the problem.

The information that this website offers is extremely useful, but the burning question is – how is it being publicised? Ensuring target groups, especially senior editorial staff, are aware of the site is the only way for it to have an impact, but it is unclear from the site whether or how it is promoted.

This is an important initiative, but it needs significant public exposure if it is to achieve its aim.

PBAC questions: update

In the December issue of *Australian Prescriber* (Aust Prescr 2004;27:155) readers asked the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) about the restriction on prescribing narcotic analgesics for chronic pain. The PBAC has now relaxed the requirements for authority prescriptions for increased maximum quantities and repeats of some narcotic analgesics.