REVIEWS OF WEB SITES

James C. Eisenach, M.D., Editor

ASA Annual Meeting Abstracts

URL: http://www.asa-abstracts.com/
Institution: Anesthesiology—ASA

The ASA Annual Meeting seems to get larger and larger, and locating the particular abstracts I want to see in the large book of abstracts is a laborious process. Here is just the site to make this easier. As it states in its home page, "Under the leadership of EMIT Committee member Ira Rampil, M.D., ASA broke new ground in 1995 when it provided a searchable database of scientific abstract titles, authors and presentation times on the Internet. In 1997 this database was moved to the ASA Web site." I thought I would give it a try before heading down to Orlando for the 1998 meeting.

Quality of Information

For the 1998 meeting, the database consists of the 1,428 accepted papers. The following disclaimer is noted in the home page, "ASA transferred the electronic papers into the Web site as submitted; ASA has not proofread them" and "A number of abstracts and/or illustrations were damaged or untranslatable. These papers are indicated in the search results." Thus, the quality of information depends primarily on the quality of information presented in the abstracts themselves. There is also a statement that any of the electronic abstract material may not be reproduced or reprinted before presentation of the abstract at the annual meeting.

Only 35% of the abstracts were submitted with a disk, and only these abstracts are available for full viewing. For the remainder of the abstracts only the titles and authors are available, and were probably scanned in, followed by a character-recognition process. Clearly, the usefulness of the search would be enhanced if all abstracts were available in complete form. I believe that electronic abstract submission for the ASA Annual Meeting will be mandatory in the immediate future, which will cure this problem.

Quality of Links

This site is under the journal ANESTHESIOLOGY site, and links are available through that site, as previously reviewed. No specific links, other than to the publisher, are available through the ASA Annual Meeting Abstract site.

Search Capabilities

The stated purpose of the site is to allow easy search of topics of interest for the attendee to the meeting. Abstracts can be searched by author (only the first author is included in this search), abstract number, or key word. Key words can be combined with the operators AND, OR, and NOT to refine the search. In addition, one can browse all the abstracts in a given category. The results of a search are listed with abstract title, first author, institution, abstract number, and, if available, the beginning of the full abstract. Clicking on the title reveals the full abstract, if it had been submitted electronically.

Although somewhat useful, the search would be greatly enhanced if one could plan an itinerary for the actual meeting. Thus, it is not possible in the current format to browse the abstracts by session or day of the meeting, and the search results do not include date, time, and location of presentation. One needs to use the abstract number or author from the results to look up in the annual meeting book to find this information. In addition, the site does not include the entire meeting, just the scientific abstracts. A complete meeting planner on the site would also enhance its utility.

Summary

Having a searchable database of abstracts for a meeting the size of the ASA Annual Meeting is a great service to the membership of the society. The capabilities of the current database are limited by low rate of electronic submissions of abstracts and the inability to plan an itinerary from the information solely available on the site. The former problem will be solved with mandatory electronic abstract submission, soon to occur for this meeting. Including the entire meeting material (abstracts, refresher course lectures, panels, and others with key words), allowing one to browse the meeting by sessions and times as well as topic, and inclusion of all times and places would make this the perfect place to optimize your experience at this meeting, which has something for everyone.

James C. Eisenach, M.D.
The F. M. James III Professor of Anesthesiology
Wake Forest University School of Medicine
Medical Center Boulevard
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
eisenach@wfubmc.edu

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