Medline global update due

Thomas A. Ipri

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, tom.ipri@unlv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib_articles

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Citation Information
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib_articles/112

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Library Faculty/Staff Scholarship & Research at Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
MEDLINE Global Update Due

Tom Ipri

If you use OVID to search Medline, have you noticed it has been stuck on the "December
week 4 1999" update for several weeks? Normally, MEDLINE is updated weekly and runs a
couple of weeks ahead of the calendar. What is going on?

Every year in January, the National Library of Medicine (NLM) updates its Medical
Subject Headings (MeSH) to reflect growth and change in medical language. OVID programs
the changes, releases a "global update" at the end of January, then resumes our normal weekly
updates in February.

MeSH is the complex yet powerful heart of Medline. Understanding its controlled
vocabulary leads to more accurate and precise searches.

How does it work? In everyday usage, a particular condition may have several different
names, for example, what one person may call a heart attack someone else might call myocardial
infarction. So instead of some articles about this condition being indexed under "heart attacks"
and others indexed under "myocardial infarction," the NLM chooses just one term and sticks
with it. In this case, the subject heading is Myocardial Infarction. All articles on this topic are
assigned this subject heading. Because of this controlled vocabulary, a searcher does not risk
missing valuable articles due to the vagaries of natural language.

What if you don't know the official MeSH terminology? OVID helps you find the right
term for whatever you type in the search box. So if you enter "heart attack," a list of related terms
is displayed, starting with "Myocardial Infarction." OVID also provides ways to explore MeSH
under the TOOLS icon in its menu bar.

Learning and using MeSH are sometimes daunting, but consider the work NLM puts into
preparing this controlled vocabulary. For 2000, the National Library of Medicine added 553 new
headings and replaced 130 headings. Also, they revised and reorganized headings for all the
Nervous System Diseases.

Most of these additions reflect the NLM's commitment to staying current. For example,
they have added Biomedical Technology, Gatekeeping, Single-Parent Family, Tissue Harvesting
and Video-Assisted Surgery.

Not only does NLM add new subject headings each year, they also replace some existing
headings. For example, Head Injuries is now Craniocerebral Trauma.

Sometimes the replaced headings read like a "What's Hot/What's Not" list for the
semantically inclined:
• Signs of possession are out: Adie's Syndrome becomes Adie Syndrome, Gerstmann's
  Syndrome becomes Gerstmann Syndrome, Gilbert's Disease becomes . . . well, you get
  the idea.
• Fans of the letter 's' should not worry however. Although the apostrophe s has fallen to
  the wayside, plurality is in: Apraxia is out and Apraxias is in. Similarly, Kallikrein is
  replaced by Kallikreins.
• Some changes are a little overdue: Dataphone is updated to Modem.
• One-word terms have fallen out of favor: Hypersomnia becomes Disorders of Excessive
  Somnolence and Insomnia becomes Sleep Initiation and Maintenance Disorders. Why
  say in one word what you can say in four or five?
For those of us who don't know any better, some of the changes just seem arbitrary: Cognitive Symptoms has been changed to Neurobehavioral Manifestations. And some seem downright bizarre: Periodic Disease has been changed to Familial Mediterranean Fever. Then again, some of us just think of it as a heart attack.