OpenCourseWare

At my wife's 25th MIT college reunion a few years ago, we heard the amazing story about the university's OpenCourseWare (OCW), the leader in what has become a global open-source movement for universities to share their course materials online with the public. Founded on the principle that knowledge is a public asset for the benefit of all, the idea for OCW began in 2000, when a committee of MIT professors first proposed this bold and innovative initiative as a means of using the Internet to improve global education and learning. Starting with 50 pilot courses that were placed online in 2002, MIT's OCW Web site (http://ocw.mit.edu) now features materials from 1,800 of MIT's undergraduate and graduate courses. More than 40 million individuals from virtually every country in the world have visited the site, with a recent record of 2 million visits during 1 month alone. Furthermore, more than 160 other universities around the world have joined the movement with their own open-source curriculum Web sites.

Upon learning of OCW, I realized that we at *Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today* may have created the first equivalent in ophthalmology when we launched the *Virtual Textbook of Cataract Surgery* (available at http://www.crstoday.com) in April 2005.[1] My idea at the time was to organize all of *CRSToday*'s monthly, original, physician-written content into an online table of contents to create a virtual textbook. This resource is updated every month with fresh articles, which is something that no printed textbook can duplicate. When a specific clinical question arises, appropriate articles can be downloaded and printed from the virtual textbook via any computer with Internet access.

The complex debate over openly sourcing journals' peer-reviewed articles revolves around who bears the costs that are currently covered by subscription fees. Fortunately, *CRSToday*'s virtual textbook is available without cost to any ophthalmologist in the world, thanks to an unrestricted grant from Bausch & Lomb. Although we in North America cannot keep pace with the monthly barrage of trade journals, so many international ophthalmologists are struggling to find the same information that overloads us.

This month, *CRSToday* launches the next step in the evolution of free online education: video OCW in the form of a new Web site named EyeTube. The brainchild of publisher David Cox, the site will have its own editorial board and will feature state-of-the-art instructional videos in all of the major ophthalmic subspecialties. Uday Devgan, MD, and Michael Snyder, MD, are the editors of the cataract section.

Although certainly different in their scope and audience, *CRSToday*'s open-source Web sites embody the philosophy of MIT's OCW movement. The Internet is a way to disseminate the expertise and experience of leading surgeons to a global professional audience free of charge. Our experts, who generously donate their time to teach colleagues through the print publication, can now educate an even larger audience through the Internet.

I hope you will take the time to visit MIT's and *CRSToday*'s Web sites. In between reading lecture notes about neutron scattering spectroscopy and nanomechanics from MIT, please check out the *Virtual Textbook of Cataract Surgery* and EyeTube and let your international colleagues know about this resource. ■

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1. Chang DF. The first virtual textbook of cataract surgery. *Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today.* April 2005. Available at: http://www.crstoday.com/PDF%20Articles/0405/crst0405_Medpage.html. Accessed February 13, 2008.