Tracing malformation syndromes with MEDLINE

Sir,

A recent annotation by Winter and Baraitser1 reported their difficulties in finding recently published descriptions of malformation syndromes in Index Medicus. They went on to discuss the use of computers in recording and searching for combinations of abnormalities, but failed to mention the use of MEDLINE (the online version of Index Medicus) which is widely available and suitable for this purpose.

MEDLINE uses a fixed vocabulary of indexing headings—medical subject headings and subheadings. It also has the capability of searching for textwords or phrases in the titles of articles and in the author abstracts, and can be used to retrieve combinations of any or all of these elements.2

Many of the more common syndromes and malformations are available as medical subject headings: for example, Down's syndrome, Fetal alcohol syndrome, Noonan syndrome, and Anus, imperforate. Other syndromes are indexed as combinations of medical subject headings, for example, Williams-Campbell syndrome under the combination Bronchiectasis + bronchi/abnormalities + Syndrome. Many malformations are indexed under appropriate organ headings with the subheading 'abnormalities', for example, agenesis of the lung under Lung/abnormalities and polydactyly under Fingers/abnormalities or Toes/abnormalities, as appropriate. It is possible, however, to retrieve these concepts cleanly by the use of a combination of textwords and medical subject headings. For example, agenesis (textword) and Lung/abnormalities.

New syndromes showing combinations of abnormalities are indexed under appropriate combinations of medical subject headings for the major features of the syndrome discussed in the article, together with either the heading Syndrome (if mentioned as such) or Abnormalities, multiple as appropriate.

The hierarchical arrangement of medical subject headings into 'trees' enables one to search for whole categories of headings so that, for example, a combination of any congenital heart defect with any sex chromosome abnormality is easily done using the 'explode' facility. It is thus possible to search for any degree of 'loose' or 'tight' combinations as appropriate to the circumstances and to modify the search formulation in the light of the number of citations found in the course of searching at any time. Aspects such as methods of diagnosis, differential diagnosis, and forms of treatment are also indexed and can be retrieved if required.

MEDLINE is widely available in Britain from a number of hosts including BLAISE-LINK through university and hospital libraries. Those without direct access to an online terminal may wish to make use of the BLAISE-LINK Search Service at this address. I will be happy to supply further details on request.

References

Membranous glomerulonephritis in Hong Kong

Sir,

Recently Wiggelsinkhuizen et al.4 and Hus et al.5 reported the high incidence of membranous glomerulonephritis in children with nephrotic syndrome and its strong association with hepatitis B surface antigenemia in South Africa and Taiwan respectively. Chan and Tsao in 1966 reported a similar high prevalence of membranous glomerulonephritis in Hong Kong children with nephrotic syndrome or persistent proteinuria, but the hepatitis B surface antigen status was not assessed.3 We would like to report our recent experience in Hong Kong.

From January 1976 to June 1982, 43 Chinese children were admitted to this hospital with a diagnosis of idiopathic nephrotic syndrome. Patients with one or more of the following criteria underwent renal biopsy: steroid non-responsiveness; aged below 1 or over 8 years; presence of gross haematuria or hypertension; persistent azotaemia; frequent relapses; or persistent hypocomplementaemia. Thirty one of 43 patients were biopsied. Analysis of results showed that five had membranous glomerulonephritis, 16 minimal change nephropathy, five mesangial proliferative