

## Asmanet<sup>®</sup> — A Web Site for Asthma, Asthmatics, and Asthmologists

by P. Godard & M. Godard

INTERASMA is a unique association, entirely devoted to asthma, with numerous members around the world. The rapid development of the Internet, as a new means of communicating and disseminating knowledge around the world, inspired us to take this opportunity to create Asmanet<sup>®</sup>. Asmanet<sup>®</sup> comprises two distinct areas: a mailing list and a Web site.

The mailing list is based on E-mails from the participants, and the number of them is growing steadily. The mailing list

allows each member to communicate with all other members, or with specific individuals. It is a moderated list, in order to avoid "parasitic" messages. Only physicians are allowed to be on the list.

The Asmanet<sup>®</sup> mailing list was created a year ago, and interesting messages have been sent. Our experience even made it possible for us to send a letter to the *New England Journal of Medicine* [1] and so contribute to the current discussion about the future of medical communication.

The Asmanet<sup>®</sup> Web site [2] was created more recently. It is open to everybody, like a supermarket. Information is available for asthmologists, but also for asthmatics, and this has to be taken into account when information is presented. Links have been inserted in order to make communication with other Web sites, such as GINA, easier and an editorial board has been established. To date, the site has had more than 12,000 visitors.

From a practical point of view: To subscribe to the Asmanet<sup>®</sup> mailing list, simply send an E-mail to: Requete.Asmanet@Paris.Net with the following text in the "Body" of the message: Subscribe Asma-L YourFirstNameYourLastName. To send a message to the mailing list, just address it to: Asma-L@Paris.Net.

### References

- [1] Godard P, Godard M. The Internet and the journal. *N Engl J Med* 1995; 333:1078–1079.  
[2] Asmanet: <http://www.remcomp.com/asmanet/>.

## New Education and Information Resources — Asmanet<sup>®</sup> and Related Web Sites

by P. Godard

Bronchial asthma is a chronic and disabling condition. It changes over time ("variability"), its prevalence is high, and it seems to be on the increase all around the world. These were some of the reasons why the NHLBI and the WHO decided to publish guidelines on the management of asthma. These guidelines also identified education as a very important objective [1].

Asthma patients appear to be incompletely and/or misinformed about many matters. Some of them are anxious about their disease, and most of them would welcome an education program, at least in France, according to a report from L'Association Asthme [2].

In many countries, a great deal of effort is expended on education and information, and many specific measures have been proposed:

- Outpatients clinics which are sometimes lead by a nurse;
- Workshops for asthma patients;
- Summer camps for asthmatic children;
- Books, magazines, leaflets, etc.

According to M. Partridge [3], numerous good studies have confirmed both the efficacy and the cost-effectiveness of such approaches.

The Internet was created some years ago, and in recent times has increased greatly in popularity. It is developing very rapidly, and so could be a good tool for providing information and education. The Minitel System in France has been operating successfully for the last ten years; the Internet promises to be even better.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of some Web sites that are of specific interest for asthma, and to try and understand if this new medium will be useful for informing and educating asthma patients.

### Internet and Web Sites

#### Asmanet

<http://www.remcomp.com/asmanet/>

The Asmanet<sup>®</sup> was created around a year ago by INTERASMA in order to make communication easier between the members of the International Association of Asthmology. At the beginning it was a mailing list, using the E-mail addresses of its members. A moderator has been appointed to make the discussion run more smoothly and to ensure that the unwritten "netiquette" is followed. A Web site has now been created, which appears to have been a success, since

more than 12,000 visitors have surfed onto the site in less than one year.

The Asmanet® Web site was created for asthmologists, but it was clear that many asthmatics came to visit it. It was therefore decided to implement specific information for them. This has been done with the help of the Association Asthme, and will be developed further in the future. Asthma patients are very interested in medical information, and there are no limits for them on this Web site.

#### Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) <http://www.ginasthma.com/asthma/>

GINA (Global Strategy for Asthma Management and Prevention) is a project that is being jointly conducted by the NHLBI and the WHO. The aim is to improve the management of asthma. The document is quite long, and the Internet is an excellent means of disseminating this information. It saves a considerable amount of money.

#### Asthma Information Center <http://www.gsf.de/wjst/asthma.htm>

This Web site has been created by Matthias Wjst, an epidemiologist living in Munich. It is dedicated to specialists, rather than to asthma patients; indeed, there are many pages of bibliographies, research results, and epidemiological data.

Once again, however, this Web site is not restricted to physicians or researchers because no password is required. It would be interesting to know if patients are interested, are visiting the site, and have obtain useful information.

#### Canadian Network for Asthma Care <http://www.hookup.net/~cnac/links.html>

This network was created in 1995, by linking up scientific societies and patient associations. The main objective is to promote patient education. The site indicates that two conferences have been organized for patient education, but concrete information is still lacking. It will be interesting to see how this site develops in the next year or so.

#### Montreal University <http://www.crhsc.umontreal.ca/hscm/CPasthme.html>

The patients who visit this Web site should live in Montréal, because they are

informed about how to join the local asthma clinic.

#### Another Canadian Site <http://enterprise.newcomm.net/ies/>

This is a new site, and it is too early to give a balanced opinion. The pedagogic methods used are different, and are based on games. Children are invited to read questions and answer them. It would be interesting to know what managers of homes for asthmatics that are situated at high altitude for long term hospitalization think of this site. The kind of games concerning asthma presented here could contribute to a better understanding of the disease (and also help visitors to learn English!).

#### Virtual Hospital <http://vh.radiology.uiowa.edu/Patients/IowaHealthBook/Allergies/Allergy.Home.html>

The virtual hospital is a fantastic Web site containing a lot of information. Some parts are specifically dedicated to patients, and allergic patients. Visiting this site is an absolute "must" for anyone interested in healthcare.

#### Frequent Asked Questions (FAQ)

FAQ pages attempt to answer the most frequently asked questions about asthma in a newsgroup. The addresses of some of them follow:

#### Allergy and Asthma Web Page <http://www.cs.unc.edu/~kupstas/FAQ.html>

The administrator of this site tells visitors: "This is an informal gathering of the net wisdom on allergies and asthma. It contains links to various (Web and non-Web) sources of information. This started as the misc.kids Allergy and Asthma FAQ, so a certain amount of this information is geared towards parents, but there is plenty of information for adults, too. If there are sources that should be included, please send me e-mail and I'll try to get the information in."

#### Asthma: General Information <http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~wrean/asthma-gen.html>

This newsgroup provides a forum for the discussion of asthma, its symptoms, its causes, and various forms of treatment.

Please note that postings to alt.support.asthma are intended to be for discussion purposes only and are in no way to be constructed as medical advice. Asthma is a serious medical condition requiring direct supervision by a physician.

The information in this FAQ is intended for educational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for consulting with a doctor. Most of the contributions are personal experiences, suggestions, and practical information. Please remember when reading this that every asthmatic responds differently; what is true for some asthmatics may or may not be true for you. Although every effort is made to keep this information accurate, this FAQ should not be used as an authoritative reference.

#### Conclusions

The Internet is probably not *the* solution for educating and/or informing patients. The first reason is that the Internet is not available for everybody, and the second is that asthmatic patients are not necessarily able to use a computer.

However, in the very near future, the Internet should be a useful new means for education and information. Other related multimedia applications such as CD-ROMs will also soon be available.

#### References

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[4] Michel FB, Godard P, Bousquet J. *Vivre avec son asthme*. Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1995

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