

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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GETTING THE PICTURE: INTERACTIVE COMPUTER PROGRAM INSTALLED IN STUDENT LABS AT UT SOUTHWESTERN

DALLAS — October 18, 1993 — Medical students in pathology and histology courses at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are about to get the picture — on computers.

Beginning this year, first- and second-year students will have access to 28 Macintosh computers connected by network with MedPics, an interactive computer program that recalls color microscopic specimens at the click of a mouse.

The pathology department already has begun preparations for revising the pathology course for the 1994 academic year under the direction of Drs. Errol Friedberg, chairman of pathology, and Vinay Kumar, professor of pathology. Friedberg is holder of the Senator Betty and Dr. Andy Andujar Distinguished Chairmanship of Pathology. Kumar holds the Dr. Charles T. Ashworth Professorship in Pathology.

"One of the things that is going to be implemented with the 1994 changes is computer-aided instruction," said Dr. Herbert Hagler, associate professor of pathology. He and four colleagues made up a subcommittee working to find an interactive computer program to supplement classroom instruction.

The new computer program, MedPics, uses icons to access pathological and histological descriptions of human-organ systems, Hagler said. It includes descriptions of the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, immune, musculoskeletal, nervous, pulmonary, renal and reproductive systems and the skin.

"To access one of these a student clicks on the icon for an organ system and that will take them to the specimen images," Hagler said. The specimens are organized by titles and features and are accompanied by a report about how each was prepared.

"Additional information gives a written description of each picture and offers a clinical-pathological correlation for each specimen," he said.

"It allows you to point out in very complicated slides, features of each specimen that would be very hard to describe in words."

Presently, pathology and histology instructors use 35 mm color slides that

(More)

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are projected onto a large screen to convey the same information during lectures and laboratories. Pathology students also use microscopes to find certain pathologic features on specimens that have been prepared on glass slides.

Hagler said the new program, which is in a one-year test period, should be less time consuming and should make information readily available to the students working in their respective labs.

The number of computers being installed to run this program and the easy access to each computer makes it ideal for teaching the more than 200 first- and second-year students who need to use it, Hagler said.

"The beauty of this MedPics program is that we can modify it locally; we can add to it, subtract from it and change descriptions," he said.

"We want to get experience with the MedPics program as it is, get our instructors trained, get students exposed to it, and basically look it over this year and see what we want to do with it locally."

If it weren't for Internet, a global computer network of more than 1 million users, Hagler and the other subcommittee members could have spent several years developing a similar computer-aided instructional program.

"We would have developed a program like this locally, but finding this on Internet has easily put us two years ahead of the game," Hagler said.

The MedPics program was developed and is being used to teach medical students at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine. Hagler read about UCSD's interactive curriculum on Internet.

The computer equipment was made available through UT Southwestern's support of curricular development coordinated by Dr. Lynne Kirk, Southwestern Medical School's associate dean for medical education.

Dr. Harold Kaplan, professor of pathology, headed Hagler's subcommittee. Other pathology faculty on the subcommittee are Dr. Jose Hernandez, associate professor, and Dr. Sidney Murphree, assistant professor. Dr. Mary Whiteside, assistant professor of biomedical communications, also worked with them.

Also instrumental in helping Hagler's subcommittee bring this technology to UT Southwestern were Kathy Hoffman, director of UT Southwestern's library, and Marilyn McKay, faculty associate at the library. Funds to license the program at UT Southwestern were provided through the Educational Technologies Laboratory, part of the UT Southwestern library.