

A CLOSER LOOK AT WWW.ePLASTY



A new Web site links plastic surgeons around the globe

THE country of Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean off the southeast coast of Africa, is more than 9,200 miles—but just a click of the mouse—away from Newark, NJ. That’s incidental information to most, but not to NJMS professor, plastic surgeon and division chief Mark Granick, who’s journeyed there twice and will head back again shortly. With only one resident plastic surgeon, this island with a population of a little more than a million needs Granick’s expertise in more ways than one. He goes there to “lend a hand” or, actually, two hands, to surgically correct congenital abnormalities, and repair disfigurements caused by accidents and burns. But it was in this far-off locale that his brainchild was conceived.

While Granick’s operating room expertise has certainly changed the lives of many in Mauritius, his greater impact may now be in the wider world of plastic surgery.

Doctoring—like most professions—is collegial in nature, with physicians learning new information, techniques, and skills from one another, and this is especially true for surgeons. So, how does a lone plastic surgeon such as Mauritius’ R. P. Gunessee—with not one colleague in his specialty within close geographical range—manage to stay current and hone his abilities? With very great difficulty, says Granick, because subscriptions to journals, which certainly help keep physicians in the loop, can run into many thousands of dollars and take months to arrive at distant post-offices. Both are

major minuses to a surgeon needing to be consistently at the top of his form.

The solution? Obviously the World Wide Web, but subscriptions to most online professional journals are incredibly costly. Granick’s solution? An “open access” online plastic surgery journal—free, always up-to-date, and immediately reachable—that would be equally valuable in Mauritius and Newark, Vancouver and Beijing, Delhi and London. The downside? None, if you’re willing to dedicate what little “free” time is left after back-to-back surgical procedures and teaching responsibilities, to create and sustain such an enterprise. So, that is exactly what Granick did, joining forces with two surgeon-colleagues to launch *ePlasty* several months ago.

“Open access” is a concept near and dear to Granick’s heart. The idea, he says, is about 10 years old and gained followers with the flourishing of the Internet. Eliminating price and time barriers to accessing scientific information is tantamount, but there are other benefits. The surgeon points out that sometimes it takes two years to get a scientist’s research into print—way too long for time sensitive material—and that many printed journals turn down 88 percent of submissions because of space limitations. “The content of open access journals is available 24/7,” he says, “the turn-around-time for publishing a scientist’s material is slashed and space is not an issue. We also do not have to wait to complete a volume before making material available—as soon as an article is ready, it goes up.”

But don’t think that “peer review” is sacrificed, he points out. An article goes through much the same process it would if submitted to a traditional journal—review by multiple experts in the author’s field, suggestions for changes given to the writer if the article is accepted for posting, and time for those suggestions to be incorporated into the text.

But the entire process moves along at a clip, with accepted articles being published within two to three months of submission. “Up and out in three months,” is his motto. In addition, reprints of an article—that can cost upwards of \$20,000 in licensing and other fees from a traditional journal—cost nothing more than the paper and ink to download them from PDF format. “The writer retains ownership of everything, including photos and other visuals,” Granick explains, “unlike standard journal articles, where the writer signs everything over to the publisher.”

The creators envisioned a site where, in addition to reading scholarly articles with accompanying visuals (28 have been posted in the last two months), you could go to learn an innovative surgical technique, study the proper way to use a new instrument or piece of equipment via a multi-media presentation, review interesting cases with accompanying questions and answers to prepare for boards, and participate in a forum where you can ask questions, and receive and post answers. For instance, a resident who plans to set up a practice could learn

from others in his field who had recently done this. (This is the only section requiring a sign-in.) The virtual “exhibit hall,” which is just getting off the ground, will allow advertisers to do “amazing things that you just can’t do in print,” such as demonstrating how to set up a machine in the OR, or showing step-by-step how to use it. This will be similar to an exhibit hall at a medical conference.

For authors thinking of submitting a paper, the editors have made your job easier by creating a template. But the work still needs to be excellent; so far, 29 papers have been rejected.

Granick takes great pride in this project. “We are Pub-Med indexed,” he states, which means the online journal’s content is available via the free search engine service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, which has more than 17 million citations from MEDLINE and other life science journals for biomedical articles back to the 1950s. The plastic surgeon also sees *ePlasty* as providing students in their 20s—who, he says, are masters of multi-tasking and seem to learn more effectively by reviewing cases and reading chapters online than by sitting through lectures—with more effective means of studying. Granick and his co-editors are intent on providing students and residents with a “core curriculum or living textbook of plastic surgery,” with all of the essential knowledge of their specialty.

The plastic surgeon will return to Mauritius in time for World Diabetes Day on November 14. His wife Carol Singer-Granick, an NJMS associate professor of pediatrics and pediatric endocrinologist, will accompany him there once again to bring her expertise to this island where no one practices her specialty. While *ePlasty* has certainly made its mark there, Granick will still be needed to work with his team on upwards of 90 of the nation’s most complex plastic surgery cases. But despite the thousands of miles he’ll journey, with just a click of the mouse at the end of this year, you just might be privy to some of his most interesting OR experiences. —EVE JACOBS

In the plastic surgery ward of Victoria Hospital, Candos, Mauritius. Standing: (l to r) Dr. R. P. Gunessee, Frank Ciminello, MD, Mark Granick, MD, and Guy Cappuccino, MD.

