

Podcasting: your information pipeline

By John J. Fried

About once a month, Quinten Black, MD, sits down at his computer in Asheville, North Carolina, fires up his Internet-based telephone service, and calls his friend, John O'Connor, MD, in New Orleans. As Dr. Black records their conversation, the two board-certified radiation oncologists chat for about half an hour about a predetermined topic: what questions a patient diagnosed with colon cancer should be asking his doctor, or perhaps, the treatment options for breast cancer.

When the talking is done, Dr. Black, using free software he has downloaded from the Internet, edits the conversation, lays in some background music, and saves the results in a MP3 file, a special format for storing voice and music. With a click of his mouse, he then posts the file on his and Dr. O'Connor's Web site, cancercast.com.

Within days, if not hours, their patients are listening to the conversation, either on computers or on portable music players, such as iPods. Drs. Black and O'Connor are podcasting—using the reach of the Internet and the burgeoning popularity of the iPod and other music players to share their thoughts and expertise. Their podcasts, which are also available on iTunes, PodNova.com, and other sites, are downloaded at least 50 times a day by people living in 40 countries.

They started thinking about podcasting, Dr. Black says, when he and Dr. O'Connor realized that patients absorb little of what is said to them in the aftermath of receiving such concerning news. "We were concerned that patients wouldn't be able to retain the complex information they received during the typical hour-long initial consultation," says Dr. Black.

"John O'Connor and I talked about

creating recorded discussions in everyday English that would allow our patients to understand their diagnoses and their treatment," he says.

Oncology podcasting

That Drs. Black and O'Connor are finding podcasting success is not all that surprising, because medical podcasting is burgeoning—and it is not just aimed at patients. If you enter a phrase such as "oncology podcasts," "cancer podcasts," or "medicine podcasts" into the search engine Google, scores of sites offering podcasts emerge.

For example, at scm.org, maintained by the Society of Critical Care Medicine, you can find podcasts on "Pharmaceutical Dilemmas in the ICU Cancer Patient" and on "Critical Care of Cancer Patients." If you want to catch up on a medical meeting, you can go to medicinenet.com and listen to podcasts summarizing the Third International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Pathogenesis and Treatment in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which took place in July 2005.

Perhaps you need advice on managing your practice. For that, you can go to soundpractice.net, sponsored by *The Journal of Medical Practice Management*, and listen to podcasts such as, "Is Your Billing Service Doing You a Disservice?" or "Getting the Most From Office Temporaries."

Podcasting 101

Technologically speaking, Dr. Black's podcasting site is similar to other such sites.

To listen now on cancercast.com, for instance, simply double-click on a podcast title.

To download the podcast to your PC for later listening, right-click on the podcast title, choose "Save Tar-

get As" from the pop-up menu, then designate where it should be stored or saved on your PC. Clicking on the file will start it playing.

To transfer a podcast from your computer to your portable music player, use the same program you use to transfer music files. Windows Media Player and RealPlayer will also do.

To create a podcast you can go to several good how-to sites on the Web. They include:

http://radio.about.com/od/podcasting/index_a.htm,
www.apple.com/quicktime/tutorials/podcasting.html, and
<http://podcasts.yahoo.com/publish>.

Finding medical podcasts

Here's a sampling of Web sites where you can hear podcasts:

Harvard Center for Cancer Prevention
www.hsph.harvard.edu/cancer/podcasts

Indiana University School of Medicine
www.soundmedicine.iu.edu

Johns Hopkins Medicine
www.hopkinsmedicine.org/mediaII/Podcasts.html

The Journal of Medical Practice Management
www.soundpractice.net

MedicineNet
www.medicinenet.com/script/main/hp.asp

Scroll to the bottom of the site, click on Audio Newsletters & Podcasts.

The New England Journal of Medicine
www.podcastdirectory.com/podcasts/index.php?iid=4702

Podcast.net
www.podcast.net/tag/medical
Society of Critical Care Management
www.sccm.org/publications/syndication.

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