

**UPTODATE MOST USED RESOURCE  
BY MEDICAL STUDENTS**

## Medical students' use of information resources: Is the digital age dawning?

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**Purpose:** One of the many challenges clinicians face is applying growing medical knowledge to specific patients; however, there is an information gap between information needs and delivery. Digital information resources could potentially bridge this gap. Because most medical students are exposed to personal computers throughout their education, this study postulated that students may be more comfortable using computer-based information resources within clinical interactions.

**Method:** In 2001, the authors monitored second-year medical students' use of a unique digital textbook, *UpToDate*, as they transitioned from preclinical to clinical years at the University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine. In 2002, at the end of their third year, students were surveyed about their preferred clinical information resources.

**Results:** Medical students rapidly adopted *UpToDate* as a clinical resource during their clinical clerkship as evidenced by a rapid growth in the electronic textbook's use. One hundred sixteen of a possible 154 students (75%) responded to the survey. More than 85% of respondents identified electronic sources as their primary resource (*UpToDate* 53%, MDConsult 33%;  $p < .001$  when compared to paper resources). They also reported using the information resources on a daily basis and requiring less than 15 minutes to answer most of their clinical questions.

**Conclusions:** This study clearly demonstrates that medical students embrace and use electronic information resources much more than has been reported among practicing clinicians. The current generation of students may be the leaders in a medical culture shift from paper to electronic resources.

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