BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Searching Skills Toolkit: Finding the Evidence. By Caroline De Brún and Nicola Pearce-Smith. Edited by Carl Heneghan, Farael Perera, and Douglas Badenoch. Oxford: BMJ Books, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 136 pages (soft cover). ISBN 9781405178884. CAN\$39.95.

The authors of *Searching Skills Toolkit* have brought a practical focus to this work, with a writing style that is lucid and direct. Caroline De Brún, a librarian for the National Library for Health (UK), manages the National Library for Health Knowledge Management Specialist Library and the National Knowledge Service Web pages. Nicola Pearce-Smith, former librarian tutor at McMaster University and experienced hospital librarian, is an information scientist from the Department of Knowledge and Information Science (UK).

Misleadingly tiny, this toolkit is what the title claims: a very tightly packed bag of carefully chosen skills for the searcher. The authors have taken gems of research advice and compacted them into a (really small) pocket-sized book. The density of this guide could be problematic if it were not well organized, but by using Web-like features such as chunking materials into small sections and using internal references to allow readers to move around in the text, the authors give the reader the option to start anywhere in the text and to navigate through it with confidence.

The introductory chapter is a mere four pages long, which prepares the reader for the pace of the material to follow; it briefly outlines the definition and purpose of evidence-based research and gives the reader a few symbols to watch for. These symbols, similar to those used in many “dummies” books, are not summarized on a single page or in a chart; however, the simplicity of the internal-referral arrow symbol, for example, is self-evident. Throughout, whether in directional symbols or in explanatory material, the illustrations are simple and relevant. There is a judicious use of elements such as highlighting, charts, and step-by-step instructions to direct readers.

The 14 chapters of this book outline the elements of search skills familiar to every library professional. The first three chapters following the introduction focus on types of Internet-based information sources. Following the introduction, chapter 2, “Where to Start? Summary Tables and Charts”, demonstrates the practicality that is the hallmark of this guide by acknowledging the time limits on the searcher and by providing a guide to directing research based on the question: “How much time do I have?” Chapter 2 also provides a summary of the types of resources available in general in chapter 3, “Sources of Clinical Information: An Overview”, and more specifically in chapter 4, “Using Search Engines on the World Wide Web”, with familiar categories like “Guidelines” and “Patient Information”. Chapter 3 is also the first time the reader sees the worked examples and screen shots that illustrate the instructions. Sample databases included are international, with examples from Canada, the USA, the

UK, and Australia, among others. Examples throughout the book include resources other than physician resources, such as public health, allied health, and patient information; a very useful list of non-English sites (seven other languages) is also included.

Chapters 5–7 (“Formulating clinical questions”, “Building a search strategy”, and “Free Text Versus Thesaurus”) deal with the preparatory skills of searching. The authors provide an excellent connection between the sections on clinical questions and search strategies with the use of a single query worked through with “worked examples”. Illustrations show the development of the query with the use of synonyms, truncation, and wildcards. Chapter 6 also contains a very useful chart of the search features of six major databases, including Cochrane, Dialog, EBSCO, OVID, PubMed, and WebSPIRS. Chapter 7 provides a clear and compelling discussion of the advantages of the use of the thesaurus and uses MeSH headings to illustrate the effectiveness of using subject terms. The chapter also includes information on browsing, mapping, and the exploding of headings. However, there is a perhaps too brief mention of subheadings.

Chapters 8–10 focus on the hands-on aspect of searching: “Refining Search Results”, “Searching Specific Healthcare Databases”, and “Citation Pearl Searching”. The many screen shots with dialog boxes emphasize the features of databases and search techniques. Chapter 8 introduces another worked example that the reader can follow. Databases used are PubMed, and OVID Medline, EBSCO, CINAHL and Cochrane, with a discussion of their limits and use. The content aspects of the various databases are not addressed here, probably due to space limitations and the amount of detail required to effectively address them. Chapter 11, “Saving/Recording Citations for Future Use”, stands alone as a brief introduction to various citation management software utilities.

“Critical Appraisal”, chapter 12, is barely more than a page. As a chapter heading, this is rather misleading, with only references to online resources and no actual editorial content. This list of resources might have been more useful had it been included as an appendix or in another chapter to provide consistency in the practical and hands-on focus of the rest of the text.

The additional materials of the toolkit seem to begin at chapter 13 with “Further Reading by Topic or Pubmed ID” and chapter 14, which is the glossary of terms. The glossary continues the emphasis on clarity and brevity, and makes a nod to several Web 2.0 topics. Two appendices follow that are extremely valuable: “Ten Tips for Effective Searching” and “Teaching Tips”. The teaching tips include four very good techniques adaptable to either the clinical setting or the classroom format.

Although this book may not satisfy the specific questions of the advanced researcher, it takes its place as a very useful toolkit for the clinician, student, or practical searcher. It is not intended for the reader

interested in the statistical or theoretical aspects of evidence-based medicine. Lacking the gentle introduction and broad focus of some guides, this book takes the non-specialist reader right to the action of searching and provides a quick, lucid, and practical introduction to searching for evidence.

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