

GPs, we want your opinion and we're asking for it

WE DO WANT YOUR OPINION AND WE ARE ASKING FOR IT. THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS OF AUSTRALASIA IS INVITING GPs TO COMMENT ON THE UPDATED ONLINE EDITION OF THE RCPA MANUAL OF USE AND INTERPRETATION OF PATHOLOGY TESTS (WWW.RCPAMANUAL.EDU.AU).

The manual, which was recently redesigned in a more user-friendly format, is the result of many years' development, explains college CEO Dr Debra Graves. "The manual is a tool that's been around almost 15 years," Dr Graves

says. "It's been a very popular resource for GPs, and over time it has evolved from paper-based to electronic format."

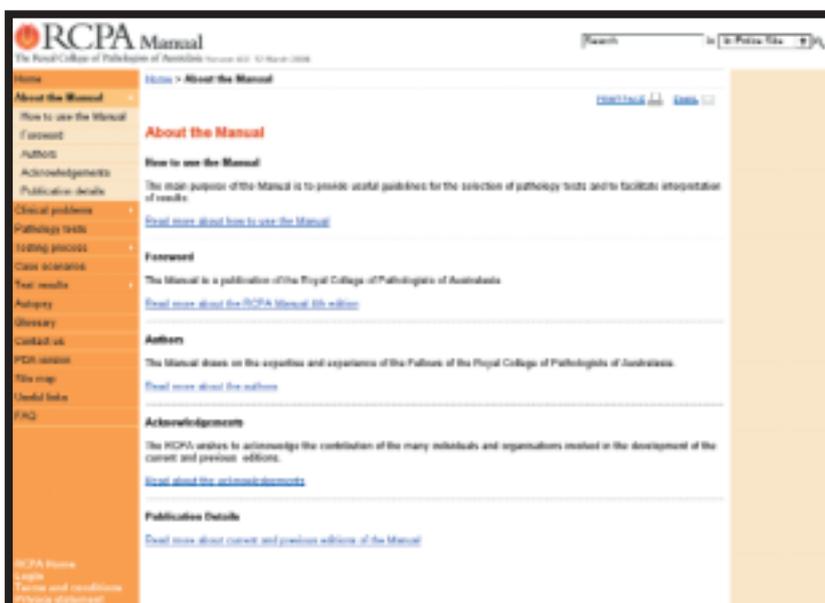
The fourth edition, developed with the support of a Commonwealth Government grant, includes new content and uses a

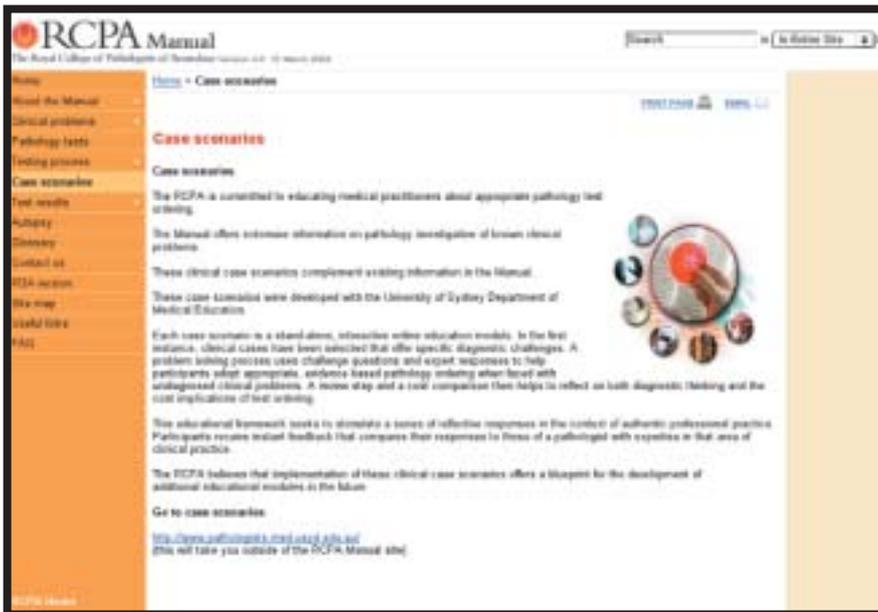
web-based data management system that can be updated continually. The manual can be downloaded in PDA format for use on hand-held computers and it is planned to be published as a book and in CD format early next year.

"The beauty of this database is that we can improve it as we go," says Dr Graves. "The feedback we get is that it's a great resource to help decide which tests you should order, particularly if you've got a difficult case."

The manual is based on the principle that tests should never be ordered on a "routine" or "screening" basis, but only when the results will contribute to diagnosis or management decisions. The manual's editor, Professor Brett Delahunt, says the current edition has been completely rewritten by an editorial team of experts who reviewed all currently available pathology tests.

"The manual was designed in its current form to fulfil three purposes: first, it's there to educate doctors. It's also there





to provide a rational basis for ordering tests. We think that's very important, because appropriate testing will impact quite dramatically on cost saving. Finally, it gives practical and technical advice regarding test procedures that clinicians need to follow.

"This is an evolving document," Professor Delahunt emphasises. "We have comments coming in all the time from pathologists and clinicians. We collate these and the committee meets regularly to consider changes. The manual will constantly be reviewed on the web version, and the hard copy will be updated periodically."

Despite the privations of dial-up internet access, country GP Dr Horst Herb from Dorrigo, NSW, regularly uses the online manual.

"We use it extensively in my practice. If a patient has an illness you don't come across very often, and you want to know whether anything has changed test-wise since you last heard of it – whether new tests have become available, how to request the test in the first place, or what tests are indicated – instead of reaching for a textbook that may or may not be on my shelf, I simply consult the online version. When I get back the result of tests I'm not very familiar with and want to interpret them, I also find it very useful to read about these tests online."

For Dr Herb, the problem list is the most useful part of the manual. "In general practice you see a limited number of conditions 99 per cent of the time, and

then all of a sudden something rare pops up," he says. "You try to brush up your knowledge quickly, and you don't have the time to consult all sorts of textbooks, so online information that's at your fingertips, and that's searchable, is invaluable."

Another regular user of the manual is Dr Hugh Heggie, a GP at Utopia Clinic within the Northern Territory's Urupuntja Health Service, 300 kilometres north of Alice Springs.

"Our service delivers health care to some 1800 Aboriginal and 15 non-indigenous people in a decentralised community of some 15 outstations spread across about 5000 square kilometres," he says. "We have limited telephone access and still rely on Royal Flying Doctor Service radios, but do have satellite internet.

"I rely heavily on online resources such as the pathology manual to ensure our community receives the best care available, despite our remote and hostile location. The resource has helped in the management and investigation of many patients who may well be living under bush shelters and speak little English."

WHAT'S NEW IN THE MANUAL?

The fourth edition allows users to access information through various modules:

- Clinical problems: sets out pathology tests according to patients' problems.
- Pathology tests: lists the correct specimen required for each test, the method of collection, reference intervals and information on the application of the test and its interpretation.
- Testing process: gives information on requests for specific tests, collection of specimens and unexpected results.
- Case scenarios: three interactive case studies of a planned 50 have been developed on a trial basis in collaboration with the University of Sydney's Department of Medical Education.. 🔥

Log onto www.rpcamannual.edu.au (or choose the link from the RCPA home page at www.rcpa.edu.au) and browse the databases – then send your comments by clicking on Contact us, or phone 02 8356 5858.

