

RESOURCES ON THE WEB: SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION ON CLINICAL TRIALS

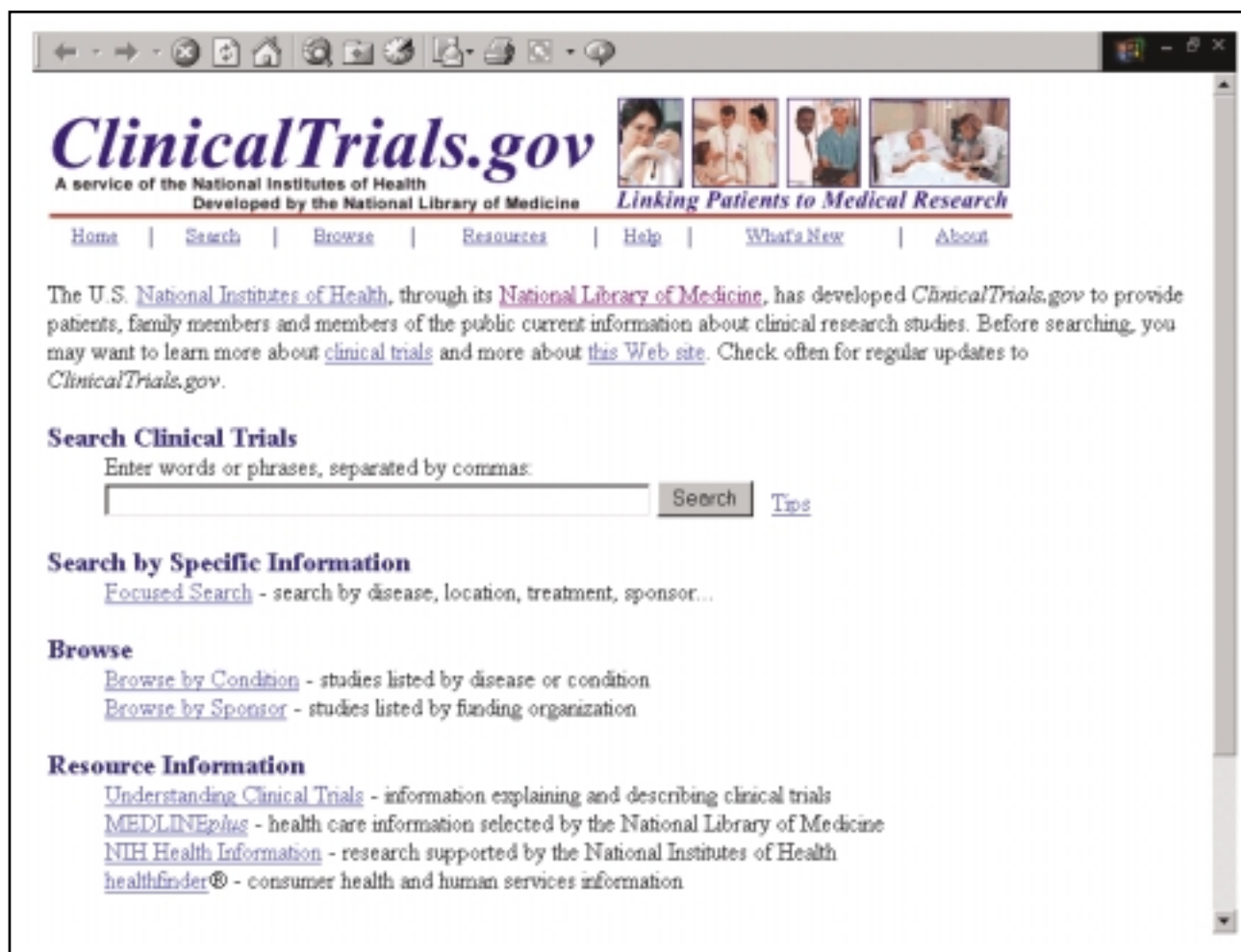
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An excellent information Web site for clinical trials is now available. ClinicalTrials.gov (<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov>) is produced by the National Institutes of Health to provide current information about clinical research studies. It is designed to help patients, family members, and members of the public and includes information on clinical trials for a wide range of diseases and conditions, including oncology.

ClinicalTrials.gov offers three search modes: basic, focused, and browse. Basic mode allows a word or phrase to be entered, separated by commas. In focused search, keywords may be input by disease/condition, experimental treatment, trial location, or additional terms. Focused mode results can also be searched by study identification number or limited by age groups, study phase, or supporting organization. Browse mode allows the

searcher to choose by disease/condition or by sponsoring agency.

Both basic and focused search modes have some special and helpful features. First, the system automatically includes synonyms for search terms. The system also performs spell checking, and if the search term is not recognized, alternate words are suggested. In the basic search mode, if the search terms separated by commas



The screenshot shows the ClinicalTrials.gov website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the site logo "ClinicalTrials.gov" and the tagline "Linking Patients to Medical Research". Below the logo, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, Search, Browse, Resources, Help, What's New, and About. The main content area features a search box with the prompt "Enter words or phrases, separated by commas:" and a "Search" button. Below the search box, there are sections for "Search by Specific Information" (with a link to "Focused Search"), "Browse" (with links for "Browse by Condition" and "Browse by Sponsor"), and "Resource Information" (with links for "Understanding Clinical Trials", "MEDLINEplus", "NIH Health Information", and "healthfinder").

This Web site is accessible at www.ClinicalTrials.gov and is also available via a link from the PubMed search page.

do not retrieve any studies, the system automatically expands the search by broadening the terms with related concepts. Connecting words to combine search terms may be entered in upper or lower case, but they must be enclosed within angle brackets < > (eg, <and>, <Or>, <NOT>).

Search results may be viewed by clicking on the link title for each study, or multiple studies may be chosen by clicking in the box adjacent to the title and then activating the *Display Selected Studies* box at the bottom of the page. Open and closed trials may be displayed, which allows results of closed studies to be retrieved.¹

The search mechanism for ClinicalTrials.gov is straightforward and user-friendly. For example, a patient looking for information on endostatin trials being conducted at a specific research institution could enter *endostatin* in the basic search frame. Since only two clinical trials are retrieved, the patient can look at the summary of each to see where the trial is ongoing. For a more specific search with a term that produces more retrieval, choose focused mode, type in the therapeutic agent, and put the institutional name in the box for location.

Cancer trial information from the National Cancer Institute's Physician Data Query (PDQ) system is included in ClinicalTrials.gov, and the search system is easier to use than PDQ. PDQ Clinical Trials (<http://cancernet.nci.nih.gov/trialsrch.shtml>) cannot be searched

using a keyword approach, a useful feature for information retrieval.

ClinicalTrials.gov provides basic information about oncology trials and often includes links to more information through a connection to PDQ. Use ClinicalTrials.gov to locate information about clinical oncology research studies first and then link to PDQ when more information is needed. Access to both the professional- and patient-oriented PDQ information is maintained through the Clinical Trials PDQ link.

Reference

1. Tse T. Searching ClinicalTrials.gov. *NLM Tech Bull.* 2000 Sep-Oct;(316):e1. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/so00/so00_clinicaltrials_js.html