

The SAC Curriculum Development Project

In January 2004 a group of 38 motivated professionals in implant dentistry from the United States met under the leadership of Professor James D. Ruskin to tackle a new project that will have far-reaching implications for the ITI's educational and training activities.

The SAC Curriculum Development project team initially intended to create a library of scientific information and material to assist ITI Speakers in putting together presentations that follow defined guidelines in terms of principles and philosophy. Since January 2004, this concept has expanded to potentially include various other ITI audiences.

The SAC Curriculum is based on a concept originally created by the Australian ITI Section, whose aim was to design outlines for specific educational courses. Jim Ruskin explains: "The Australians deserve a lot of credit because they created a concept, immediately implemented it and freely exchanged information with us. We utilized the outlines and some of the information from them and then incorporated it into our project. Ultimately this could be used not only for specific courses but by anybody within the ITI and associated partners worldwide to exchange information about clinical techniques and scientific knowledge.

In short, the main goal was to create a platform to provide educational information for all different kinds of groups in line with the ITI philosophy as expressed in the ITI Consensus Papers."

The project team comprised seven teams, each of them including both restorative and surgical specialists to ensure representation of every aspect of implant dentistry. The organizational set up was similar to that of the ITI consensus conferences: "Each team was given the responsibility of gathering and collating information on specific topics and then assembling particular knowledge modules. Each module contained learning objectives, topics of instruction, pertinent references and available educational materials such as images and graphics", Ruskin sums up.

It soon became obvious that a central requirement for the project's success would be a powerful, state-of-the-art software platform characterized by ease of use, flexibility,

intuitive access to information and expandable functionality for future revisions. The project group found a good technical solution with the interactive, web-based finebrain™ Expertise Platform by finebrain AG. "We were already using the system while working on the development project in order to exchange information between team leaders and members all over the United States," says Ruskin. All the contributors could simply log on via the Internet, review what other team members had published and make additions, changes or corrections. With this extensive hands-on experience to draw on, the finebrain system proved to be the ideal solution to host the ITI Curriculum Library."

Over a period of 18 months the Curriculum Development teams put tremendous efforts into the project, spending hundreds of hours collecting, editing and reviewing information and material. While most of the cooperation could be done via the finebrain system, the group also had several face-to-face meetings: "At times we needed to have everybody in the same room to discuss all the information as a whole, so that everybody got a chance to see what each module team had brought to the table," says Ruskin. "At the last meeting in Spring 2005, the final project was reviewed from start to finish. In the end it was truly a consensus group decision on which information and references were included and which were not."

In July 2005 at the ITI World Symposium, the first release of the Curriculum Library went online and is currently accessible for official ITI Speakers and certain ITI officers via the ITI Knowledge Network. This initial version is a database to be used by ITI Speakers when creating lectures and presentations. All information is categorized according to its complexity into three major sections: Core/Basic ("Simple"), Advanced and Complex, based on the SAC classification developed by the Swiss Society for Oral Implantology. Color-coded symbols provide users with visual feedback on the level of complexity of each individual topic: a blue circle represents "Core", a red square stands for "Advanced" and a black diamond for "Complex" (Fig. 1).

Each module comprises learning objectives, recommendations for topics to be covered, pertinent references including links to PubMed as well as speaker tools such as product photographs and graphics. All modules are fully searchable by keyword, and a dynamic navigation tree allows for intuitive browsing by main topics. "If I was preparing an introductory lecture on implants," Jim Ruskin explains, "I might be interested in looking at some basic material to include in my presentation. All I need to do is to click on "Core Level" to get a list of all the modules within this category (Fig. 2); next I might want to include some background information on the Straumann Dental Implant System, some introductory material on osseointegration and maybe basic biological principles. I then simply click on those modules to add them to my virtual shopping cart. When I am finished I go to "check out" and download my individual course outline that includes every module I have selected." What is not included though are clinical images: "We believe it is important that speakers create individual, custom-designed presentations based on their clinical experience and their own clinical pictures rather than trying to lecture from someone else's material that they may not be that familiar with."

The Curriculum Library is being constantly revised - a "living document", according to Ruskin. Although it is currently predominantly geared to speakers, he sees the first version as just the initial building block of a comprehensive educational resource for a much larger target group: "We look at the project as the foundation of a structure upon which further developments are going to be made to enhance services to ITI Fellows and Members. The implications for this library go far beyond simply putting together courses, it's a library to exchange information about clinical practice, clinical techniques and scientific information."

With the first release, the Curriculum Library has become a worldwide project. "The Education Committee has adopted it, and now other sections have seen what we have created and are jumping on the bandwagon as well, because they see the value in this

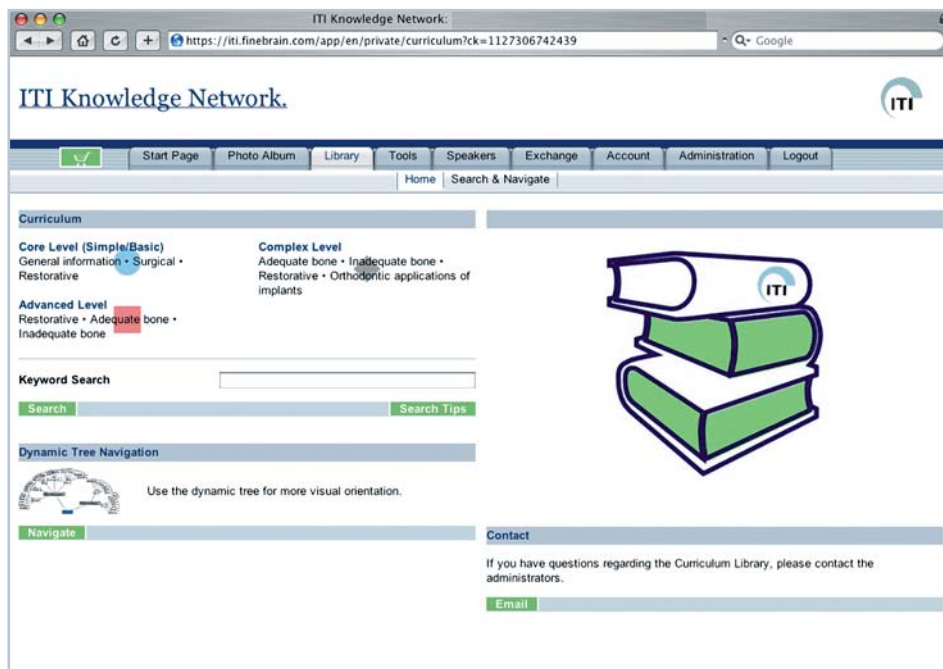


Fig. 1 Classification of complexity by color-coded symbols

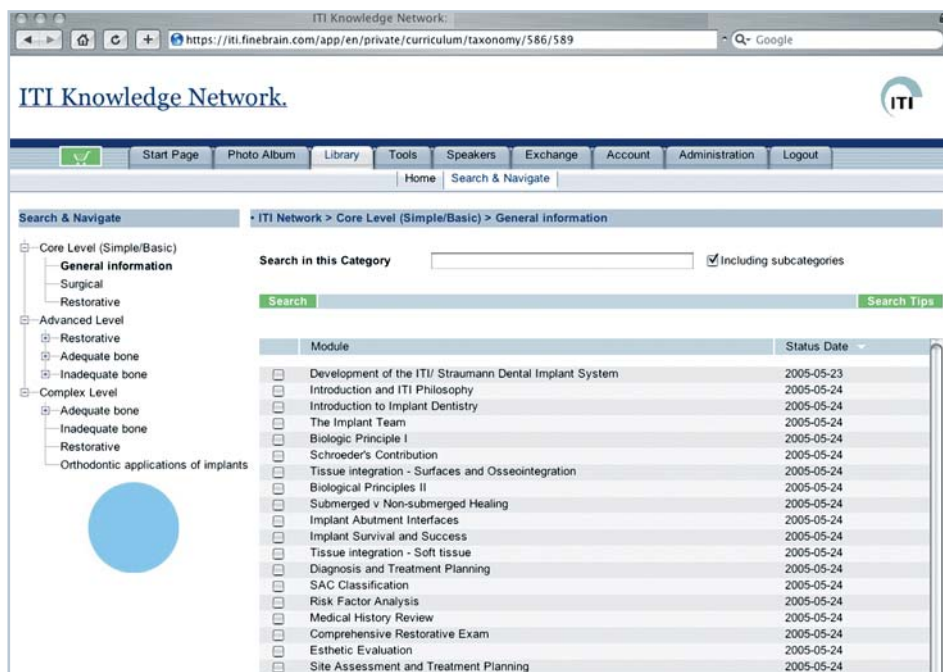


Fig. 2 List of modules by category

project for the organization as a whole," Ruskin says. "Every Section can utilize the current information, and if they want to build their own country library, they can certainly use the Curriculum's framework as a base. We have tried to make the library fit within the overall structure of the ITI, but Sections can adopt or include any

information they want, they really can tailor it to make it work for their Section."

Jim Ruskin sums up: "This is only the first step of an extensive and long-term project to organize and categorize the knowledge to which we have access within the ITI as a whole."