Healthtouch
To find information on over 10 000 prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) preparations, go to www.healthtouch.com, where you can enter the name of a medication and retrieve information about it. A disclaimer states that the information is ‘generalised’ and not intended as medical advice. Fair enough. Anyone seeking this kind of information should either be a professional or seek the advice of a professional.

A search for information on ranitidine resulted in 12 items:
Apo-Ranitidine, Ranitidine
Gen-Ranitidine, Ranitidine
Novo-Ranitidine, Ranitidine
Nu-Ranit, Ranitidine
Ranitidine
Ranitidine Bismuth Citrate Systemic
Zantac, Ranitidine
Zantac 150 GELdose, Ranitidine
Zantac 300 GELdose, Ranitidine
Zantac 75, Ranitidine
Zantac EFFERdose Granules, Ranitidine
Zantac EFFERdose Tablets, Ranitidine.

As we are mainly concerned with OTCs in this issue, I sought out details of Zantac 75, which provided a very comprehensive discourse on H₂-receptor antagonists in general with information on correct use, storage, side-effects, etc. Very useful and complete. This applies to others such as ibuprofen, etc.

An alphabetised list is available if you are just browsing without any particular drug in mind. One tip, though: don’t use the ‘Search’ link on the home page. It wasn’t working the day I visited. Rather click on the ‘Drug Information’ button of the page (Fig. 1: see arrow). This will take you to a search facility that works.

MEDLINEplus (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus)
This site, hosted by the well-known and highly respected National Library of Medicine in the USA, also provides drug information (Fig. 2 — see arrow). Here also, you will find an alphabetised list. The information on ranitidine (for comparison) is the same as on Healthtouch and I wouldn’t be surprised if Healthtouch gets its information from MEDLINEplus.

In addition to the drug information part of the site, there is a link to late-breaking news for consumers from the Consumer Drug Information department of the FDA.

American Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
The FDA itself has a Drug Information Page at the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) which is to be found at the URL: www.fda.gov/cder/drug/default.htm (Fig. 3). They have a separate link to information about OTC drugs, which includes such discussions as ‘An aspirin a day — just another cliché?’ and much more on both prescription and OTC medications.
Pharmacy and you (www.pharmacyandyou.org/)
This is the name given to the information site of the American Pharmaceutical Association; it is meant for the lay public, but as I’ve always said, there is usually information that the clinician can use, even if it is to inform patients.

The ‘pharmacy’ shown on the home page (Fig. 4) has many links including one titled ‘Medications’. This has a list of topics of interest to the consumer, including a link to information on OTCs at www.pharmacyandyou.org/aboutmedicine/OTCs.html.

One of the links at the bottom of the home page, is a ‘Drug Interactions Brochure’. This retrieves a PDF format document. Some of the advice they provide about OTCs is shown in the box:

Do’s
• Read the package and label of all OTC medicines carefully.
• Make sure your doctor and pharmacist have a list of all the prescription and OTC medicines, vitamins, and herbal products you use every day or every so often.
• Consider using one pharmacy for all of your prescription and OTC medicines.
• Ask your doctor or pharmacist to help you choose OTC medicines that are right for you.
• Report any side-effects or problems that you have after taking a prescription or OTC medicine, vitamin, or herbal product to your doctor or pharmacist.

Don’ts
• Don’t combine prescription and OTC medicines unless told to do so by your doctor or pharmacist.
• Don’t take any medicines that were prescribed for another person.

RxList – The Internet Drug Index
This site (Fig. 5) is managed by Neil Sandow, PharmD, ‘a licensed California pharmacist with twenty + years of experience in retail and institutional pharmacy and twelve years as a Director of Pharmacy for several Bay Area hospitals. Dr Sandow has been publishing on the Internet since 1994.’

It is also a comprehensive site, and you can learn about the information contained by going to www.rxlist.com/about.htm.

South African Drug information sources
There is not much on the local scene apart from some universities’ pharmacology departments.

The Health Systems Trust has a drug information page (www.hst.org.za/info/druginfo.htm) (Fig. 6) which is intended to keep health workers at all levels abreast of developments in drug policy and practice in South Africa. Areas covered include drug-related legis-
lation and regulations, drug pricing, drug selection, essential drug lists and formularies, drug procurement and distribution systems, rational use of drugs, other health systems issues relating to drug management and much more drug-related information.

The Wits University Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology (www.wits.ac.za/pharmacy/career) (please note that ‘careers’ had been misspelt on the site’s URL) has a list of links to organisations like Pharmnet, the web site of the Pharmaceutical Society of SA (www.pharmnet.co.za) which has patient information links, and other sections which deal with such topics as allergy, migraine, obesity and hair loss in men.

FUN SITE OF THE MONTH
Real fat cats
Garfield is the archetypal fat cat, but for some real life examples of feline obesity, go to www.tubcat.com. These animals show us humans how to get ‘fat and sassy’. The one in Fig. 7 is just one illustration (although a prime example) of what you’d find on this site. If you’re a cat lover (or maybe even better, a cat hater) you’ll find this site … um … absorbing.

Fred N Sanders

Fig. 6. HST drug info page.

Fig. 7. Tubbercat.

The Wits University Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology (www.wits.ac.za/pharmacy/career) (please note that ‘careers’ had been misspelt on the site’s URL) has a list of links to organisations

**CPD MATTERS**

Media statement by the HPSCA

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPSCA) announces that the CPD Status Reports, containing CPD points obtained during the CPD year 2001, recently issued to medical practitioners and dentists, may in certain instances not be a true reflection of the CPD points obtained during 2001 as the Reports had not included the points accumulated during the CPD year 2000.

Accurate and appropriate CPD Status Reports will be issued by the end of February 2003 to all practitioners involved.

The Council regrets any inconvenience caused to practitioners in this regard.

For further information please call Mr Phephela Makgoke, Communication Officer, HPSCA.

Contact number: (012) 338 9368

**Ethics points**

The January 2003 issue of CME was accredited for 4 CPD ethics points. The accreditation number is A001/483/01/2003.