Communications for this section will be published as space and priorities permit. The comments should not exceed 350 words in length, with a maximum of five references, one figure or table can be printed. Exceptions may occur under particular circumstances. Contributions may include comments on articles published in this periodical, or they may be reports of unique educational character. Please include a cover letter with a complete list of authors (including full first and last names and highest degree), corresponding author's address, phone number, fax number, and email address (if applicable). Specific permission to publish should be cited in the cover letter or appended as a postscript. CHEST reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

Online Journals: Moving in the Right Direction

To the Editor:

The editorial by Dr. Block¹ was an excellent introduction to the issues that are raised by the potential of publication on the Internet. The most important comment was that of his friend, Dr. J. Ocic Harris, who proclaimed, "you can't take your computer to the bathroom." The reality is that until we can do this, print journals will not be replaced. Yes, computers may share some of the print media spotlight but will not supplant it. Why not?

Although the initial volley of responses published in a subsequent print issue of CHEST reflects the seduction and mystique that the Internet has over both "the converted and the diverted,"² current technology, miraculous in its improvements over the past 10 years, still has not produced an intuitive interface. It wasn't many years ago that graphical user interfaces changed the way we relate to computers. For those of us who remember DOS, it seemed like a great step. However, one night's time searching, typing, and weaving the Net can be equally as frustrating.

I believe the respondent who would rather get an email each month with an electronic version of his favorite journal² may be in the minority of people who actually read all their mail, print or otherwise. But, he has the right idea about customized journals, since so much of what the individual subscriber pays for ends up unread in the trash.

The respondents who wish to send CHEST to all corners of the earth² may find many corners without the computers with which to read the journal or without users to know their power. But they too have the right idea in that the power of the Internet to create a "global village" is engaging.

However, until computers interact with humankind like humankind interacts with the print media, they will only be tools, albeit more graphic, colorful, and audible tools than the print media, but tools nonetheless.

The drawback to using computers now is the way we must interact with them to extract information. It is still tedious to use a mouse or other pointing device, or a keyboard, and to be tied to the front of a computer screen while searching for information. Perhaps it is less tedious or more "fun" than a library literature hunt, but it is still, at best, time-intensive.

A better way to interact with a computer would be to ask it for information using our voice, like we interact with a librarian now; to write on it using a pen and electronic ink, like we write an article now; to carry a flat, Internet-linked computer and read by turning its electronic pages, archiving a worthy article in a paperless file like we tear and file with a journal now.

The power of computers is not in the information they can display (a well-produced video does as much) but in their ability to store an entire library of journals in a small space for rapid retrieval in any place (like at a nurses' station). The great computer potential will be to provide every journal, all linked, in a handheld device the size of an issue of CHEST, that can be talked to, written on, stored, and yes, taken to the bathroom.

Voice and handwriting recognition, cellular-linked handheld computers, and other advances in neural network technology could make computers just like print media, the intuitive interface. The best electronic publications will be those that accurately emulate their printed, videotaped, and recorded brethren, just without the paper or the video- or audiotape. However, there is little doubt that electronic editors of these new paperless print journals will be every bit as busy as they are today, and therefore I suspect Dr. Block's job and the jobs of his successors are secure!

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Treatment of Spontaneous Pneumothorax

The Clinician's Perspective on Pneumothorax Management

To the Editor:

Baumann and Strange (September 1997)¹ 2 conclude that "a national consensus statement appears needed to focus an agenda to improve pneumothorax care." The British Thoracic Society published such guidelines over four years ago;² our paper appears as reference 6, but is misquoted as merely a "journal review," without any further comment.

Production of the UK guidelines was stimulated by the great diversity in management of primary spontaneous pneumothorax (PSP), similar to that in Baumann and Strange's survey. Patients with small PSP were admitted unnecessarily, intercostal drains were inserted inappropriately, observation and simple aspiration were underused options, there was confusion about tube clamping, and specialist advice was often sought late. All 450 senior UK pulmonologists and thoracic surgeons were asked to give their