SOFTWARE REVIEW

Public Health Image Library (PHIL). URL: phil.cdc.gov. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA; mbr1@cdc.gov; www.cdc.gov. System specifications: Java-enabled browser such as Netscape 4.x or Internet Explorer 4.x or better; monitor resolution of at least 800 × 600 pixels (1,024 × 768 recommended); 16-bit colors minimum; 17-inch monitor recommended; browser set to accept cookies; 32 MB of RAM minimum.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have assembled a large and varied collection of still images, image sets, and multimedia files to create the Public Health Image Library (PHIL™), a Website available at phil.cdc.gov. PHIL provides an organized, universal electronic gateway to the CDC's pictures. Taken from various public health sources including the CDC itself, most images are in the public domain and are not copyrighted. It is recommended, however, that credit be given to the source when pictures are used.

Educators, scientists, public health personnel, the media, and people worldwide may find the collection useful. Subjects include viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites, people with various diseases, statistical charts, and notable public health figures, as well as CDC personnel. The database covers a wide range of dates, and searches can be limited by date.

Search terms may be entered in a search box, or users can click the Search button to view hierarchically organized categories of people, places, and sciences. Each category has several subdivisions. By clicking on the plus sign to the left of an entry, users display the subdivisions along with the number of images in the category. The Science category, for instance, includes among other topics ''Anatomy, Gross and Microscopic,'' ''Diseases,'' and ''Organisms and Infectious Agents.'' Not all entry terms have images. In order to view the images associated with a category, users click on the category label and then click on the large right-pointing arrow so that the selected category appears in the ''Search on These Categories'' box. Then, clicking the ''Go'' button brings up thumbnail views of the images assigned to the selected category. If multiple categories are selected for searching, a Boolean ''AND'' is assumed, and only pictures assigned to all selected categories will be retrieved. A ''Text Based/Advanced Search'' option allows users to search on multiple terms and to limit by image type (still images, multimedia files, etc.) and by date. Results may be sorted by creation date, submission date, title, or image identification (ID) number. A search by image ID number is also available.

Search results are displayed as thumbnail photos (10 per page) in a small table on the left side of the screen. The table also includes columns that give the title, description, and assigned categories for each image. Viewing the thumbnails on a twelve-inch monitor requires scrolling to see all four columns. By clicking on a thumbnail, a full-size version of the image is displayed on the right of the screen. Images can be opened in another window or downloaded. Function buttons at the top of the larger frame may be used to move forward or backward in the list of retrieved images, to get information about the image, or to return to the search mode. In addition to title, description, and ID number, the image information area includes content provider, provider email address, creation date, source library, and photo credit information; creation date information is often not given.

The frequently asked questions (FAQs) section of PHIL provides much helpful information about searching the image library. An email address (mbr1@cdc.gov) is provided for users to ask questions or make suggestions. According to the FAQs' information, ''PHIL requires that cookies be enabled on your browser as we use them to maintain state. PHIL does not at this time leave any cookies on your system. All PHIL cookies expire when you exit your browser and are never written to your hard drive.''

PHIL is a good source for locating medical photographs, both current and historical. For instance, it contains a photograph of David Satcher, the current CDC director, as well as photographs of past CDC directors and other notable people in medicine and science. PHIL is not intended to be a comprehensive collection of images, and it is not a substitute for other comprehensive historical collections of images such as Images from the History of Medicine (IHM). IHM (available at wwwihm.nlm.nih.gov) is the National Library of Medicine's database of nearly 60,000 images dating from the Middle Ages to the present.

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