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Probing medical science

AS A newly launched medical encyclopaedia, it provides a near-Darwinian survey of the evolution of medical science.

The pathway to the intricacies of high science begins with the basics such as the DNA and RNA, the genetic code, cells, anatomy and physiology. The 'human body gallery' packs graphics that pinpoint the varied anatomical features.

The medical encyclopaedia brought out by the Thiruvananthapuram-based research-oriented group, 'Mission India' CD ROM format, packs almost 500 pages of text, over 2,000 title graphics and at least 10 three-dimensional animations.

The CD examines the anatomy of the human body in detail, discusses various diseases, rewinds to the 14th century bubonic plague in Europe and the 20th century Spanish fly phenomenon that killed millions before it touches upon contemporary scourges such as AIDS and SARS.

"The product is aimed at disseminating medical information to people from all walks of life, from children and the layman to the medical practitioner and the medical student," says V.J. Reji Vasanth, director of the Thiruvananthapuram-based 'Mission India'.

Mr. Vasanth says the CD-ROM, with nearly 1.6 gigabytes data storage capacity, has an easily accessible information retrieval system for a broad range of users.

The entire package was put together by a research team named 'MIBIZ' with the technical assistance of practitioners here and extensive inputs from doctors abroad.

The outcome of research represents a comprehensive compilation of information culled from the best of various streams of medicine -- from Ayurveda to Allopathy and Mesopotamian and Egyptian medicine, Arabian medicine

and Chinese herb therapy.

In fact, according to Mr. Vasanth, the venture started out as a trial measure when the Government Ayurveda College assigned the team to develop an encyclopaedia on human physiology.

The team was able to put together voluminous data under various sections such as haematology, the cardio-vascular system, the heart, the respiratory system, the digestive system, reproductive system and the nervous system.

The positive response to the compilation spurred the team to produce a medical encyclopaedia with the title, 'Medical Encyclopaedia on SARS, Viral Disorders, Human Anatomy and Physiology', says Mr. Vasanth.

The human body is analysed in the context of the emergence of medical science. The human diseases section focuses on concepts of diseases, the major scourges in history, the symptoms and signs, the diagnosis and prevention measures. The sub-section deals with Louis Pasteur and the germ theory, Robert Koch and modern bacteriology. The spectrum of diagnostics starts with the stethoscope, the sphygmomanometer and the X-ray and leads on to the state-of-the-art machines such as the radioneuclide scanners, ultrasound imaging, etc.

The haematology portion deals with the functions of the blood, formation of blood cells, the immune system, healing and repair, antibiotics and antibodies.

The CD-ROM also opens the window to the world of viruses. Among the viruses that are put under the microscope are the adenoviruses, bunyaviruses, retroviruses and the coronaviruses (the genus behind SARS outbreak).

Special attention has been given to the newest mutant virus in the context of SARS epidemic with a variety of inputs collated from countries ranging from China and Philippines to Hong Kong and Finland.

An exhaustive section is devoted to the respiratory system and respiratory disorders.

By M. Dinesh Varma