

THE USE OF VIRTUAL SLIDES IN NORTH AMERICAN MEDICAL SCHOOLS

Carolyn C. Phillips and Michele Roullet
The University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine
Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Introduction

The recent development of “virtual slides” (VS) has added a new teaching tool to visually oriented disciplines, such as Pathology. We conducted a survey of all North American medical schools to determine their use of VS. Although only a few schools are using VS (18/85, 21%), many schools intend to use them in the next 3-5 years (36%). Faculty involved in teaching courses that currently use glass slides (histology, pathology) or who would like to incorporate microscopic findings into their teaching format (all disciplines) will find the results of this study informative and helpful.

Abstract

VS are new teaching tools for visually oriented disciplines, such as Pathology. A virtual slide is a glass slide that has been fully digitized at high resolution. The student views the VS on a computer interface in a way that simulates the use of an actual microscope. In order to understand how schools are using VS, we conducted a survey of North American medical schools on their current and intended use of virtual slides and the successes and problems that they have encountered. A total of 85 schools responded (58%). Of the responders, only 18 (21%) currently use VS and the vast majority of these (72%) use them in conjunction with glass slides. A total of 31 (36%) don't currently use VS, but intend to use them in the next 3-5 years. This survey also identified sources of VS, specific applications of VS, major problems, and successes, as well as establishing a resource list of faculty with experience in this area.