

## **"Virtual Professional Community" (VPC) for the ARC Research Network for Tissue Engineering (ARNTe)**

The ARC Research Network for Tissue Engineering is committed to being the one of the principal methods of facilitating communication for all interested researchers in the field of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine in Australia. It consists of a collaboration of organisations/research groups and will facilitate, encourage, and promote the exchange of information in the field of tissue engineering through education, research, and dissemination of knowledge useful to scientists, engineers, and clinical investigators for the benefit of people in Australia.

On line communication will greatly enhance the ability of ARNTe to achieve its goals. The ARNTe web site will provide a powerful communication tool between diverse groups working on research related to Tissue Engineering. The web site will provide a forum for presenting new data, facilitate the sharing of techniques, and represent a focal point for bringing together the latest information from many sources and stimulate new collaborations.

The ARNTe web site is designed to provide an efficient way of information/data sharing that will overcome geographical & time zone differences. Moreover, the Internet can supply ARNTe with a working environment that includes forums, list servers, bulletin boards, libraries of publication, white pages, newsletters etc.

The web site will create a new "meeting place" for its members, a virtual meeting place that would supply ARNTe members with many of their professional needs. This can be achieved by various technologies of the World Wide Web to create a new "Virtual Professional Community" (VPC) aimed at ARNTe members and professional groups related to Tissue Engineering.

This community, that will use the Internet and other knowledge-sharing means, should facilitate typical professional activities (i.e., dialog, marketing, professional updates, and personal development).

The scope of implementation of virtual communities varies from one community to the other. It depends of the budget of the project and how far the organisation would like to take this concept. ARNTe will begin by utilising few of the basic principles of the virtual professional communities (VPC) rather than trying to imitate complicated models.

The principles that should be adopted are:

- **Aim for a self-evolving community** - The community should be created in an interactive way using three factors: the users, the material on the site, and the technological systems supporting the community.
- **Use geographical (body) metaphors** - We suggest a metaphor of a body to be illustrated on the homepage. The Brain, The heart, mouth, eyes can be used as titles for the main sections of the site.
- **Technology** - Develop technology that would enable basic computer users to use the site with no fear or problems. (Uploading documents, automatically publishing content, efficient information organization/technology, Administrative tools etc.)
- **Comprehensive White Pages** - To facilitate personal networking, a VPC should make it easy to find the e-mail address and personal URLs (where they exists)

for nearly anyone -- not just "members" -- with a serious interest in the VPC's focus

- **Well-Edited Frequently Asked Questions** – A well-edited FAQ can be a very useful, constantly growing repository of knowledge on the VPC's focal topic. It should also cover the organisation of the VPC and how best to take advantage of it, although the essentials of such information should also appear on the VPC's main Web page.
- **Well-Run, Lively Discussion rooms, E-mail lists and newsletters** – There should always be multiple, lively, well-moderated, threaded discussions in progress within the VPC focus, and anyone should be able to launch a new one. Some threads will be very brief, initiated by a specific question like: Does anyone know ...? How can I ...? What is the best way to ...? Where can I find ...? Why is it that ...?. Other discussion threads will be much more substantive and enduring.
- **Comprehensive, Well-Organised, Well-Annotated, Quality Resources** – The resources offered by a VPC should be comprehensive within its stated focus, organised for easy navigation by members, annotated well enough to eliminate most unproductive resource-fetching, efficiently searchable where browsing is not practical, and screened for quality. Some resources will be original to the VPC and some not. Some will be on the VPC's server and some on other servers.

Adopting some of the above concepts using technology to make it easy for members to use the site will result a successful web site, a self evolving professional community that its members contribute to but even more important – benefit from.