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Information Portal – An Important Tool for Health Registries

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For the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society Database Management Committee

Abstract

Information portals are largely perceived as web sites which display information to the general public. Although this is true to a certain extent, portals are much more interactive and provide a gateway to a data repository. Access to information on these portals is channeled through an intricate network layer of assigned permissions. In healthcare, such information access is not often heard of - mainly because of the need to ensure an appropriate security system is in place to protect health information at a patient and hospital level. Overcoming the abovementioned shortcomings, ANZICS is successfully running a secure portal with over 200 users and 130 different channels for individual contributing units and governance groupings.

Keywords:

Health Registry ANZICS Portal audit research intensive care

Introduction

Easy and quick access to data in registries is often a complicated procedure for health researchers. Use of an information portal could prove to be an answer to this time consuming and complicated process. The Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society (ANZICS) commenced implementation of its information portal for contributing hospital adult intensive care units (ICUs) in 2005. In this paper we will discuss the methods used by ANZICS to achieve the results as well as the benefits and difficulties in setting up a secure portal for a health registry holding a large amount of confidential data and requiring multiple levels of access dependent on user status.

Information portals are largely perceived as web sites which display information to the general public. Portals are capable however, of much more interaction and provide a gateway to a data repository. Access to information on these portals is channeled through an intricate network layer of assigned permissions.

Method/Process

The ANZICS Databases Web portal was established for contributing units to have direct access to their data. This access is provided by using a unique combination of username and password. Following are the steps in creating the security layers for controlled access to the information:

- Subset the database into datasets for each contributing units
- Save the subsets to a location on public domain
- The security layer is put on these subsets to create channels for each set of data
- User management should be put in place with username and password allocation
- Usernames are assigned to a respective group for specific information access

Issues of concern

Several problems were identified in the process of setting up and managing the ANZICS portal :

- Creation and maintenance of programs to subset the data based on user and group profiles
- Monitoring and optimization of server performance to provide appropriate speed in the delivery of web based information
- Sharing of password and other confidential information by users
- Information security in a closed network computer laboratory setup

Results

Overcoming the abovementioned shortcomings, ANZICS is successfully running a secure portal with over 200 users and 130 different channels for different contributing units.

The wide geographical spread of ANZICS contributing units which are connected using the portal is shown in figure 1.

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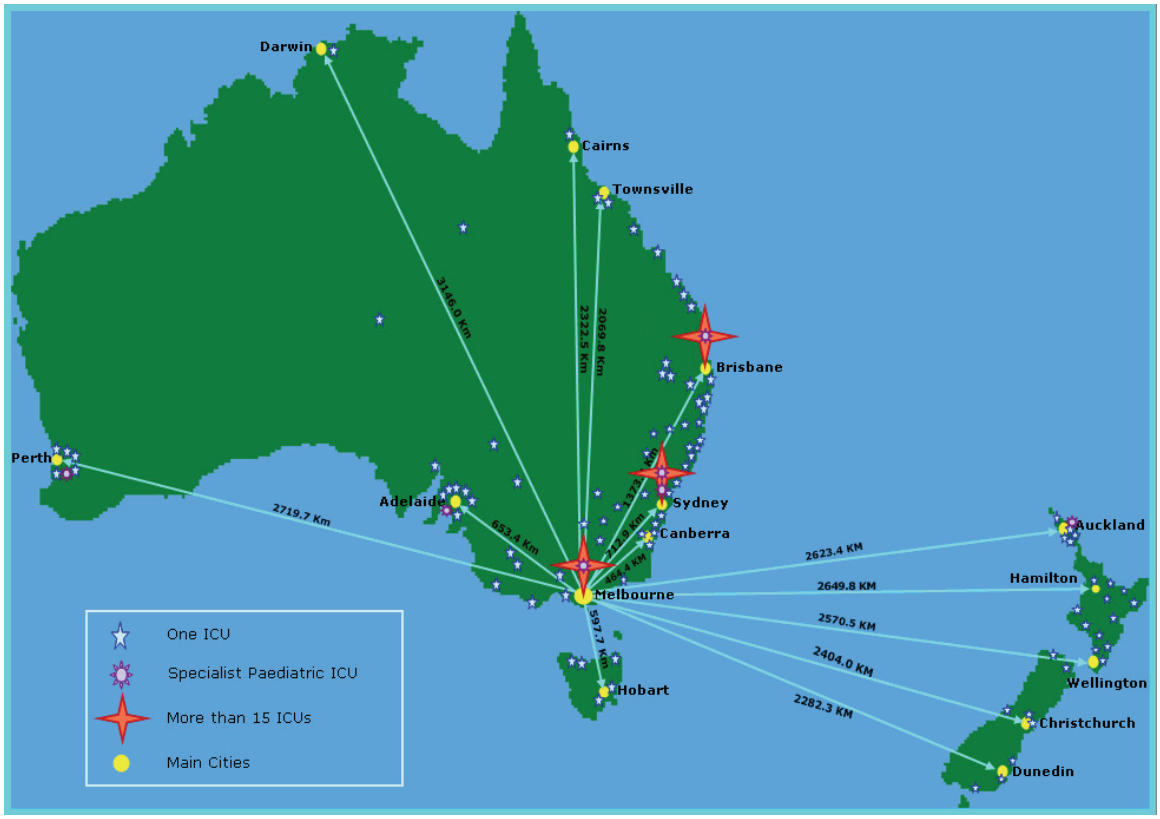

Figure 1 - Australian and New Zealand sites connected by ANZICS portal network