Improving the transparency of health information found on the internet through the HONcode: an impact study

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CONCLUSION: Outside of a certification process, the respect of the HONcode principles by health websites appears to be extremely low. In our study, only 0.6% of control websites (group A) respect all the HONcode principles against 89% for certified websites. Certification appears to be an effective means of enforcing the HONcode principles in a sustainable way since 89% (147 websites) of the certified websites were always compliant at least six months after obtaining the certification. The certification improve the transparency of the health information provided in the site but cannot warranty the accuracy of the information.

Authoritativeness
Indicate the qualifications of the authors

Complementarity
Information should support, not replace, doctor-patient relationship; Mission and Audience of site

Privacy
Respect the privacy and confidentiality of personal data submitted to the site by the visitor

Attribution
Cite the source(s) of published information and dating of medical and health pages

Justifiability
Site must back up claims relating to benefits and performance

Transparency
Accessible presentation, identities of editor and Webmaster, accurate email contact

Financial disclosure
Identify funding sources

Sponsorship
Clearly distinguish advertising from editorial content

The HONcode principles

HON: developing practical ethical solutions to find and promote reliable health information on the Internet since 1996.