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BREAKING NEWS: HAITI FACING A MAJOR HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY



Published: January 13, 2010

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HON - Health on the Net Protects the Vulnerable and Gullible

By John McCormick



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You must have noticed by now that, when it comes to information on the Internet, in the famous words of Sturgeon's Law, 90% of everything is crud.

This is particularly true of medical information sites where the most vulnerable and desperate often seek help when other resources fail them.

It is actually pretty easy to tell which sites are at least trying to provide useful information - sites which are supported by general advertising that is, which run stories or information not themselves pushing readers to buy things, are probably legitimate.

Ads by Google

When it comes to medical sites there are a lot of companies pushing their particular brand of vitamins or expensive reports, or services and it is sometimes difficult for the layperson to tell which ones really are giving useful information and which are not.

A particular site may be legitimate, providing cutting-edge medical information, but many are just pushing snake oil in the grand old tradition of scam artists.

Fortunately there is an official international organization which works hard to police the honesty and reliability of medical information web sites and certifies those which apply for membership and comply with a basic code of ethics.

In 1995 experts on telemedicine met in Geneva to discuss how best to use the Web to provide reliable healthy information.

Participants included pioneer heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey, professionals from the World Health Organization, CERN, and more.

The conference resulted in a move to "promote the effective and reliable use of the new technologies for telemedicine in healthcare around the world."

On March 20, 1996 www.hon.ch was launched to help guide lay and professional users to reliable medical information on the web. HON is a non-profit Swiss foundation which grants certification to medical information web sites whose webmasters subscribe to the HON Code of Conduct which calls for the presentation of authoritative and trustworthy information.

<http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/>

HON is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) associated with the World Health Organization and the U.N.

More than 3,000 medical information web sites have applied for and been approved as HON certified information resources.

HON information for publishers is located at

<http://www.hon.ch/web.html>

You can find HON certified sites using the search engine at

<http://www.hon.ch/HONsearch/Webmasters/hunt.html>

and there is a search plug-in available for browsers

<http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Plugin/Plugins.html>

For example, if you have the plug-in loaded and you visit my newmedicineonline.com site you will find that it is HON certified.

Webmasters who become certified can also place an HON link on their site - see the upper left hand side of my site for an example.

Clicking on this will show the current HON status of the site.

HON standards call for medical information web sites to comply with these precepts:

Authority - that is, the site authors must identify their qualifications to be providing information.

Compliment the doctor - that means the site is intended to assist in the doctor-patient relationship, not replace a medical professional.



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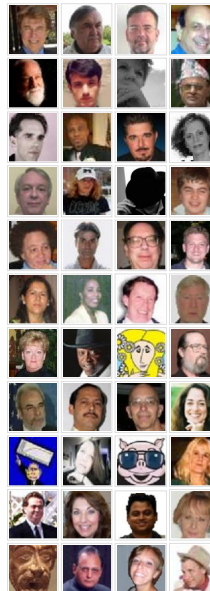
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Attribution - the information presented must be backed up by published authoritative information.

Claims must be justified.

Site contact information such as an email address must be provided.

Funding sources (if any) must be disclosed so you know that, for example, the site isn't just one big advertisement for some pharmaceutical company but disguised as unbiased information.

And, finally, any advertising on the site must be separated from editorial content and clearly identified.

HON has announced that it is participating in these conferences in 2010:

MedInfo 2010 September 12 to September 15, 2010, Cape Town, South Africa. This is the 13th World Congress on Medical and Health Informatics.

<http://www.medinfo2010.org/>

The Health Executive Summit Paris, France from 19 to 21 May 2010 where European health leaders discuss best practices and strategies.

The High Level eHealth Conference for 2010.

<http://www.ehealthweek2010.org/>

HON members get a discounted World of Health IT conference rate in Barcelona, Spain, March 15-18.

Disclaimer - since I operate a free medical information web site (www.newmedicineonline.com) I have been a member of HON for several years. I get no monetary benefit from either HON membership or the medical web site which runs at a deficit every year.

John McCormick is a reporter, /science/medical columnist and finance and social commentator, with 17,000+ bylined stories. Contact John through NewsBlaze.

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