



Medical information you can trust!

At the cutting edge of Internet research and technology
for online medical and health information quality

HON's mission is to guide the growing community of
healthcare consumers and providers on the World Wide Web to
sound, reliable medical information and expertise. In this way,
HON seeks to contribute to better, more accessible and
cost-effective health care.

Since its creation in 1995, more than 51 million citizens have
used the HON website to find sound information about their own
health, their family's or patients' health.

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

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A great leader with endless vision, energy and
commitment to his work and an inspiration to
all. His work lives on in the Health On the Net
Foundation which he helped create and then led
until his death in 2002. He was and still is
sorely missed.

HON: the official certifying body for all French health websites

HON: the official certifying body for all French health websites.

Collaboration of the Health On the Net Foundation (HON) with the Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS).

Since its beginning 12 years ago, the Health On the Net Foundation (HON) has come to be a widely recognized name, associated with quality online health information.

Not only has HON grown in terms of implementation of its services, but also has increased its liaisons worldwide to include the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), where it has consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

Today, we are proud to announce our collaboration with the French National Authority for Health (Haute Autorité de Santé - HAS), which chose HON to be the official certifying body of all French health websites.

In view of its pioneering work and long expertise, the HON Foundation has been chosen by the HAS to implement the certification of French health websites according to the French bill passed on the 13 August 2004. This certification will be performed by HON through the implementation of the HONcode (a set of eight quality criteria established by HON).

"Our certification (provided free of charge) is concise while giving guidance towards conformity and is unique in its kind" said HON Executive Director Celia Boyer. She added "The HONcode enables the identifi-

cation of sites of quality and confidence, thus contributing towards the general improvement of trustworthy information and websites, as well as helping the user in his search for health information."

France is the first government to have taken the initiative of standardizing the quality of the available online health information which will benefit the French public through the provision of a pool of trustworthy health information.

"The collaboration between HON and HAS reinforces the need for reliable and trustworthy health information and thus, the necessity for quality standardizing bodies like the HON foundation" stated HON President, Professor Antoine Geissbühler.



<http://www.has-sante.fr/>

New HON Report: **Distinction of HONcode certification**

Over the past 12 years, HON has continuously developed in all aspects to provide better services, with the ultimate goal being the improved quality and reliability of online medical information for consumers.

One of the latest such endeavours is the paper version of HONcode certification.

Until now, upon HONcode certification, a website was awarded an online HONcode certificate, accessed by clicking on the HONcode logo displayed on that site. This certificate along with the HONcode logo was proof of HONcode certification.

HON recently developed a paper version, which is in a way, a reward to those sites which comply by the HONcode principles and would be paper proof of HONcode certification.

Purpose of paper proof of HONcode certification

- Provides further proof of quality and reliability of the onsite medical information
- It is a hard copy of HONcode certification
- Provides improved visibility of the HONcode certificate and HONcode certification

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed and sent to webmasters of HONcode certified sites to find out their view point and their opinion on how useful it would be to them.

- The questionnaire was sent as an email. Attached to this email was the downloadable certificate, unique to each site
- 143 sites certified in February 2007 were sent this email in July 2007



Results

- 100% of webmasters who answered the questionnaire thought the certificate would be helpful
- 93% liked the format and look of the certificate
- 73% thought it was sufficient to receive the certificate electronically (as opposed to both electronically and postal)
- 40% of webmasters to whom the email was sent, downloaded their certificate

Out of the above obtained results, it can be seen that this new paper proof of HONcode certification is generally thought to be useful.

Based on these results, we have decided to make this certificate available to all the webmasters of HONcode certified sites, which have been certified for one year or more, providing further proof of the continuing reliability and quality of the information provided.

HON Quality Management System

The Health On the Net Foundation as an organization enforcing a quality ensuring code of conduct for health websites, strives to continuously improve the quality of its' services through numerous ways.

Measures for internal and external quality assurance have been established with HON for years but recently HON took steps to improve the system in respect of the stringent standards such as the EN 45011/ISO65 norm.

HON is a pioneering organisation in promoting and deploying reliable online medical information through the enforcement of its code of conduct, the HONcode.

Since its formation in 1995, it has continuously strived for not only, quality assurance of the websites it reviews, but also its services provided, including and especially the HONcode certification process.

In addition to the internal annual inspection in respect to the quality assurance, HON too is now also inspected on a regular basis by neutral, qualified organisations according to stringent norms like EN45011/ISO65 enforced by internationally recognized and independent private or governmental certifying organizations. This thereby assures that the HON certification system fulfils the most stringent internationally recognised standards.

It also demonstrates the willingness of HON to collaborate with official bodies, like the recent collaboration of HON at the Governmental level in France with Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS) for certification of all French health websites.

"Being externally evaluated by independent organizations and receiving certification according to internationally recognised norms provides HON with further international validation and recognition" Celia Boyer, Executive Director of HON said.

Standards of quality are applied for all HON personnel through fulfilment of required criteria during recruitment, formal training, internal auditing both regular and ad hoc and documentation of all HON procedures

In addition, HON now engages in new activities such as the Complaint Handling and Tracking system, the Automatic Difference Tracker that enhance the trust in the reliability of HON's certification activities and at the same time make them more transparent to online medical and health publishers as well as consumers.

In order to improve its quality and respond to the needs of our users (Internet editors and consumers) HON encourages you to help us by participating in our questionnaire and the HON blog which is an upcoming feature and will soon be online. (Please check regularly)

"We will continue to improve both the quantity and quality of services provided, with our constant and ultimate goal being to create a universally accessible online pool of trustworthy and reliable medical information." Boyer added.

News Tools For TrustWorthy Health Information

The HONcode Toolbar

Searching for health information on the Internet has just become easier - and safer - thanks to a new multifunctional browser plugin from Health On the Net Foundation (HON), the Geneva, Switzerland-based non-profit organisation, best known for its code of ethical conduct, the "HONcode", a standard for trustworthy online information used by thousands of health and medical web publishers.

The HONcode requires that information providers disclose potential conflicts of interest, provide author's credentials for medical information, and address thorny issues of privacy and confidentiality, which vary according to legal jurisdiction.

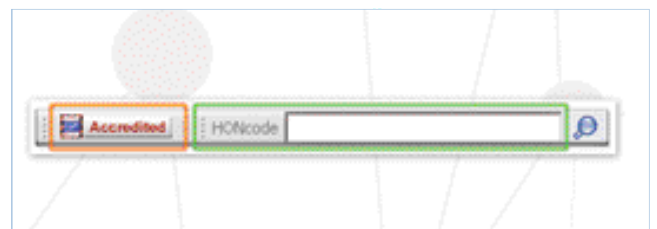
The HON tool bar is the first of its kind, according to HON executive director, Celia Boyer. "Given the critical nature of health information and the unregulated environment of the Internet, web surfers need all the help they can get to make sure the sites they visit have been checked by an independent authority," says Boyer. "HON has worked since 1995 to make the Internet a safer place for patients, caregivers and medical professionals who rely increasingly on the web for answers to everyday health questions."

The HON tool bar allows web surfers to highlight and select text from a web page and search for HON-certified sites

about that subject. A search function explores the HONcode certified websites, with nearly 5,700 websites participating in the search. The "HONcode status" feature goes one step further: it lets the user check whether a site bearing the HONcode seal is in compliance with the Code.

The HON tool bar is a small software program (plugin) that can be easily added to the most popular web browsers. The three tool bar functionalities make use of HON's online services to help users find reliable information on the full range of health subjects. The HON tool bar was developed jointly with NetUnion, a software development firm in Lausanne, Switzerland within the European research project ACTIVE-HEALTH.

The HONcode Toolbar can be downloaded from the HON website www.HealthOnNet.org/.



HONcode Toolbar: search engine and checker of the certification status

Poor Quality Websites on CAM dangerous for cancer patients

A study published in the Annals of Oncology has concluded that nearly 50% of the 32 most popular websites on CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine) for cancer are not good quality. The study was conducted by experts in complementary medicine from the Universities of Exeter and Plymouth, under the direction of Professor Edzard Ernst.*

“The cancer cures discussed on these websites are not supported by good scientific evidence,” according to the study. Even worse, three websites are qualified as “outright dangerous”. These three sites had applied, but were rejected, by Health On the Net Foundation for HONcode certification.

On the positive side, “four websites stand out” from the rest for the exemplary quality of their information and treatments: quackwatch.org, ebandolier.com, cis.nci.nih.gov and rosenthal.hs.columbia.edu. Three sites, quackwatch.org, rosenthal.hs.columbia.edu/ and cis.nci.nih.gov are HONcode certified by the Health On the Net Foundation. The full list of Websites evaluated is provided in the study.

As an action plan, the study concludes that “cancer organisations and other impartial interest groups should investigate websites and create and administer a ‘seal of approval’, for safety and reliability, such as the HONcode”.

Today, HON counts more than 5,000 certified websites in some 72 countries worldwide that bear the HONcode seal. “With this expertise and notoriety, associated with major cancer organisations, HON can today implement such an action plan in order to protect and guide the citizen to safer and better quality online information,” commented Professor Antoine Geissbühler, President of HON Foundation and Director of the Service of Medical Informatics of the Geneva University Hospitals.

Similar codes exist, but the HONcode is the most widely displayed and the oldest, existing since 1995. The HONcode requires that information providers disclose potential conflicts of interest, provide credentials for authors relaying medical information, and link or otherwise reference the source of medical facts listed on the website. This fundamental study should raise patients’ awareness on the variability of the quality of websites on CAM for specific diseases.

*“Assessing websites on complementary and alternative medicine for cancer” by K. Schmidt and E. Ernst, published by the Annals of Oncology number 15, pp 733-742, 2004, full article at <http://annonc.oupjournals.org/cgi/content/full/15/5/733>

WRAPIN

a next-generation search application is now available at <http://www.wrapin.org>



WRAPIN is the acronym for "Worldwide online Reliable Advice to Patients and Individuals". The project features allow to retrieve

medical information using a query expressed in the user's natural language, and to compare it to existing scientific information published via different medical databases chosen for their editorial quality. Furthermore, this tool permits to validate the information found on the Web, by determining whether the information exists in the published scientific literature.

The user friendly approach is improved by the "contextualisation" of the query within the results. The automatic identification of the conclusions of the scientific articles allows users to swiftly access the information they are looking for.

ReadSpeaker

The new voice of HON

HON has recently signed an agreement with ReadSpeaker France to bring innovative "Voice-on-the-web" audio technology to the HON website. The system will improve access for sight impaired and dyslexic users, language learners and anyone who prefers to listen rather than read.

A recent survey conducted jointly by HON and the EU-Enabled project showed that only one in three web publishers try to make their websites or applications accessible, pointing out the need for greater awareness and training. To listen to a HON web page, just click the ReadSpeaker icon located at the top of the page or adjacent to the text you wish to hear. ReadSpeaker uses audio software already installed on most personal computers to read text with state-of-the-art voice synthesis.

ReadSpeaker

HON

Wins eEurope Award for eHealth on the 6th of May 2004



HON has been named as winner of the eEurope Award for eHealth - 2004, in the category "eHealth Information tools and services for citizens." Over 100 submissions were received for the award. The HON submission focused on online information quality, addressing the fundamental issue of standards for the presentation of health information.

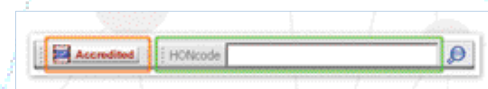
The eEurope Awards are organised by the European Institute of Public Administration, with the support of the Information Society Technologies Programme of the European Commission, to recognise innovative initiatives in the areas of eGovernment and eHealth within Europe.

HONcode Toolbar

The new Tools for Trustworthy Health Information

The HON tool bar is the first of its kind, allows and web surfers to highlight and select text from a web page and search for HON-certified sites about that subject. A search function explores the HONcode certified websites, with nearly 5,000 HONcode-certified websites participating in the search. The "HONcode status" feature goes one step further: it lets the user check whether a site bearing the HONcode seal is in compliance with the Code.

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



Attacking Their HONor*

By Christopher Wanjek

You found a website touting a mysterious herbal product guaranteed to cure everything from baldness to jaundice through an eight-week, \$160 regimen grounded in an esoteric California moon cult remotely based on Eastern mysticism. How can you tell if the health information is reliable?

Some calls are easy to make. You can safely assume statements like “tidal forces control hair loss” and “dermatologists don’t want you to know” are suspect. But for those gray areas — such as whether yoga, tai chi or herbal medicines are practical treatments for specific illnesses and conditions — there’s the HONcode, from the Geneva-based Health on the Net Foundation.

Similar codes exist, but the HONcode is the most widely displayed and the oldest, having been created in 1995. The HONcode requires that information providers disclose potential conflicts of interest, provide credentials for authors relaying medical information, and reference the source of the information it presents.

“The HONcode is a way to improve the quality of information” on the Internet, said Celia Boyer, executive director of HON, which is funded by the Geneva Ministry of Health and the European Union. “Given the critical nature of health information and the unregulated environment of the Internet, Web surfers need all the help they can get ... We try to do the best we can.” She gets by with a seven-member team.

The HON site itself provides a search engine for those seeking medical information, and search results are derived only from HON-validated websites. Search for staples of quackery such as “touch therapy,” “crystal healing” or “yogic flying” via the HON site, and the only reference that appears is an article uncovering touch therapy fraud. Type in “homeopathy,” and you get a mix: links to websites presenting evidence of its possible efficacy and to other sites asserting that homeopathy is merely a placebo system.

Clearcut violators of the HONcode are sites such as Homeopathyworld.com, which displays the HON logo even though a click on the icon reveals a statement from HON that the site “does not respect” all of HON’s principles. Some sites that display the HONcode were certified several years ago and may be out of compliance. Boyer said that checking up on old verification is her group’s main issue and that HON is working on automatic techniques to continuously check compliance.

Boyer said that while the verification process continues to improve, the system is voluntary and the public must remember there are no guarantees that the information they may find on the Web is fact.

* “Attacking Their HONor. Some Dispute Value of Logo Used to Verify Accuracy, Integrity Of Health website Contents” Copyright © The Washington Post. April 20, 2004 Full article at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25556-2004Apr19.html>

ReadSpeaker

The new voice of HON

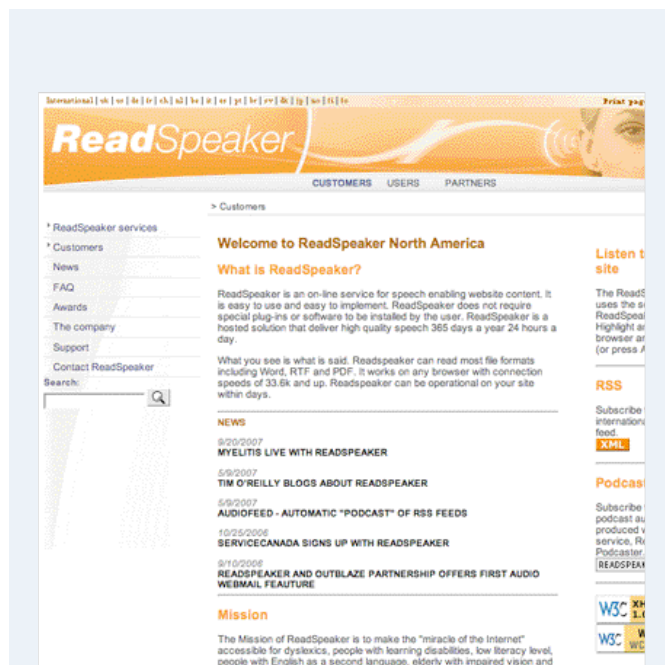
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"Accessibility is a priority for us" says Celia Boyer, Executive Director of HON. "Health-related websites in particular need to reach out to disabled users."

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HON's multilingual website includes pages in English, French, Spanish, German and Portuguese, which are among the nine languages currently supported by ReadSpeaker.



<http://www.readspeaker.com/>

<http://www.HealthOnNet.org>



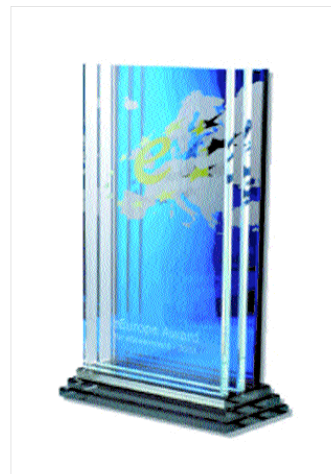
HON Wins eEurope Award for eHealth the 6th of May 2004

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The eEurope Awards are organised by the European Institute of Public Administration, with the support of the Information Society Technologies Programme of the European Commission, to recognise innovative initiatives in the areas of eGovernment and eHealth within Europe. It was presented by Mr David Byrne, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, who has particular responsibility for Food Safety, Public Health and Consumer Protection.

HON online tools for citizens include the HONcode certification system for online information quality, HONselect directory and MedHunt search engine containing resources for over 30,000 health and medical subjects, and WRAPIN: HON's next-generation search application to guide consumers to trustworthy sources, analyzing online medical content to help lay users deal with the ever-increasing number of health-related web pages.

For nearly ten years, HON has focused on the essential question of the provision of health information to citizens:



How can we incite information providers to respect ethical standards? To cope with the unprecedented volume of healthcare information available on the Net, the HONcode offers a multi-stakeholder consensus on standards to protect citizens from false or misleading health and medical information.

HON wishes to share this award with its nearly 5,000 certified websites. This recognition rewards the efforts made by HONcode-certified websites to maintain the HONcode standard at the national, European and international levels. Currently, websites in some 72 countries worldwide bear the HONcode seal.

HON would especially like to thank the Département de l'Action Sociale et de Santé (DASS - République et Canton de Genève, Switzerland) and the Geneva University Hospitals for their support since HON's creation in 1995, which have made possible the unrestricted delivery of HON's services, free of commercial influence. HON web servers are powered by Sun Microsystems.

HON Wins WSIS Award for the Best Content in eHealth category

6th of May 2004

HON is the winner of the Best Content in e-Health category of the World Summit Awards for a comprehensive overview on best practice in e-content and creativity on the Information Society.

Health On the Net (HON) participated in the WSIS (World Summit of the Information Society) from 9th to 13th December associating with the Geneva University Hospitals for the ICT4D Platforms projects. HON has been involved in the content aspect of the projects set up by the Geneva University Hospitals, contributing its advanced search-engine technologies and its experience with natural language processing and distributed database access.

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consumers to trustworthy sources, analyzing online medical content to help lay users deal with the ever-increasing number of health-related web pages.

At WSIS, governments and other stakeholders have discussed the controversial subject of control over e-content. To address this critical issue, HON pioneered a voluntary approach: a code of ethical conduct, the HONcode, which information providers can adopt to distinguish their websites as trustworthy sources.

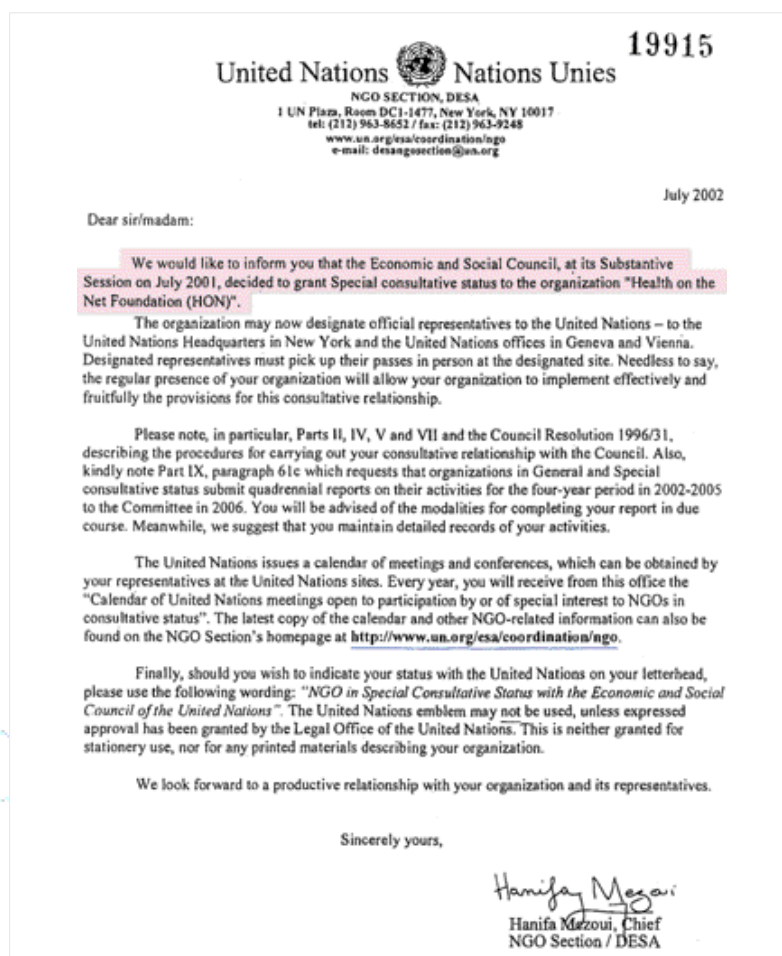
Identifying information as credible is just the first step; quality information needs to be made available to those who seek it. General-purpose search engines can help, but they stop short of verifying the information or the credentials of its authors, and their ranking criteria are kept secret from the public for business reasons. Specialized expertise, human intervention and neutrality remain essential. HON has developed a range of tools to help Internet users find trustworthy information, and to help information providers by setting minimum standards for health and medical websites.



NGO status for HON

Health On the Net was granted NGO status on 23rd July 2002 by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Health on the Net Executive Director Celia Boyer announced that HON has been granted consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The new NGO status will facilitate HON participation with the World Health Organization and other UN bodies, and reinforce its consultative role with government ministries in several countries where HON has contacts.



HON was established in 1995 under the impetus of M. Guy-Olivier Segond, former Geneva State Councillor, and the auspices of the General Direction of the Département de l'Action Sociale et de la Santé, Geneva. The organization was then directed between 1998 and 2001 by the late Professor Jean-Raoul Scherrer.

Pioneering the field of health information ethics, HON was first to introduce a code of conduct for medical and health websites (HONcode). The HONcode has since been adopted by over 5,700 websites from 72 countries. HON presents its research at international academic gatherings and collaborates on several European Union projects. Although best known for the HONcode, Health On the Net has also developed online applications for patients and caregivers, including HONselect a user-friendly directory of selected medical resources forming an encyclopaedia of 33,000 medical terms in 7 languages. HONselect offers privileged access to 17 million Medline articles, 52,000 ongoing clinical trials, 3,000 news sources and HON's own databases.

Health On the Net Foundation Guest Editor of a Special Issue of The International Journal of Medical Informatics on **Health and the Internet for All**

HON European Co-President Prof. Antoine Geissbuehler and Executive Director Celia Boyer served as guest editors of a special issue of the International Journal of Medical Informatics, with the theme, "Health and the Internet for All."

The theme, "Health and the Internet for All" is a reference to the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care, which sets the goal of Health for All, somewhat optimistically, by the year 2000. The Internet, undreamed of in 1978, today adds the dimension of electronic access to the global challenge of equitable distribution of healthcare.

This issue of IJMI presents the innovative work of researchers and technologists who demonstrate the potential of the Internet to share valuable health resources. Their experiences and reflections show that the online medium can be used to bring people together and make a difference in the lives of healthy persons and patients. Challenges remain, beyond the reach of technology, before the benefits can be felt by all.

Health On the Net Foundation has played a leading role in the promotion of quality in health information, a prerequisite if the Internet is to be a trusted partner in our well-being. But the Internet is not only the world's greatest public library, it is the primary venue for global health information exchange: amongst doctors, between doctors and patients and from patient to patient, with new information sharing paradigms continually emerging. As a collaborative work tool, the Internet is now essential for biomedical research and for the development of health systems.

Advanced information retrieval technologies integrating scattered databases give new meaning to Knowledge Management.

Use of the Internet by healthcare consumers is not limited to public websites and information searching, but can be used to complement treatment in the form of online self-help support programs, and provide patients with access to telemedicine and other care and monitoring systems.

This special issue of IJMI takes stock of these and other trends in Internet use, presenting a selection of papers arranged in four sections: Internet usage statistics and demographics; Quality and security issues in e-Health; Promoting access for the disabled and impaired; and Empowering the patient and the care provider.

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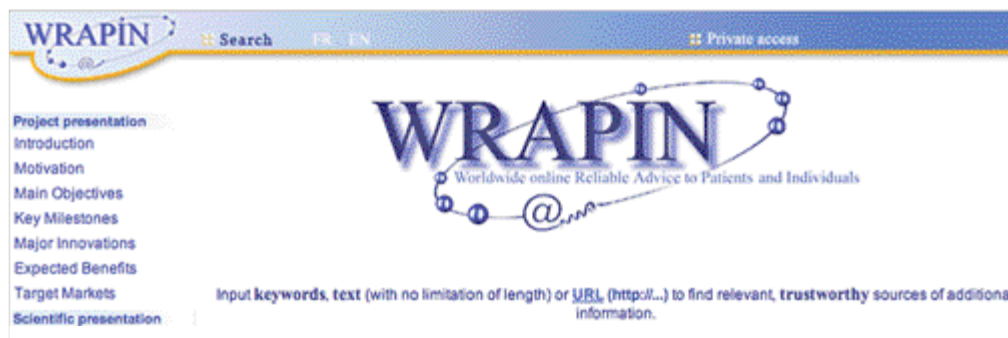
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Edited by Celia Boyer, Antoine Geissbuehler
<http://www.ijmijournal.com/issues/contents>



WRAPIN

a next-generation search application



laboratories specialising in the domain of medical informatics; they contribute with their tools and know-how.

WRAPIN will be freely available to all at no cost.

General

With the coming of the age of the Information Society and particularly its most celebrated vector, the "Internet", citizens worldwide, naturally think that medical information is altogether more abundant, more available, more accessible, maybe more comprehensible, but also more reliable.

In fact, the situation today is more complex than in the past. More than ever before it is necessary to sort out the good from the bad. Faced with a profusion of information coming from diverse sources, some of which are purely commercial, while others represent the views of religious sects in some cases, one must be able to choose intelligently even if one lacks a technical appreciation or level of competence to deal comfortably with the subject. This paradigm is true for all citizens, including medical doctors themselves, although the latter are -for the most part - in a far better position to judge, due to their training, practice and professional experience.

WRAPIN is a natural offshoot of this observation.

WRAPIN, its main functions

WRAPIN, the project

An acronym for "Worldwide online Reliable Advice to Patients and Individuals", WRAPIN is a project financed by the Commission of the European Union (European Project: IST-2001-33260). The different partners in this project, initiated by the former president of HON, come from

WRAPIN's functions

The WRAPIN project aims at making available a system allowing to:

- Retrieve medical information using a query expressed in the user's natural language. WRAPIN compares this with scientific information from selected medical databases (currently eight) chosen for their editorial quality.
- Validate information found on the Web, by determining whether the information exists in the published literature. Reading the answer is made easier with a automated synthesis of the contents of the result, making use of
 - the colour outlining of significant words
 - the automatic identification of the conclusions or the "contextualisation" of the query in the results
- Perform a query in one's own mother tongue and access medical databases written in other languages.
- The interface offers the opportunity to reformulate one's query using a medical dictionary (used to correct possible misspellings) relative to the contents of the different medical databases.

Next-generation search application:

- Automatically determines the reliability of medical and health documents
- Multilingual research tool in six languages

WRAPIN, example:

Check an URL or submit free text



- Appropriate scientific knowledge based on related medical and health information.
- Presents results in context and pinpoints pertinent information to help citizens make informed decisions.

European Project IST-2001-33260
Scientific & Administrative Coordinator:
Health On the Net Foundation

Trustworthy medical knowledge databases



The HONcode

Quality of health related information on the Web: the HONcode certification

The HON Foundation is a Non-governmental Organization dedicated to improving the quality of information intended for the general public and to facilitating quick access to the most relevant and up to date medical information for medical professionals. The Foundation is internationally known for its pioneering work in the field of health information ethics, notably for the establishment of its code of ethical conduct, the HONcode. The HONcode is the most widely accepted reference for online health and medical publishers

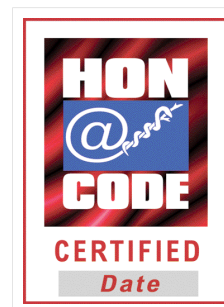
The HONcode: a certification System

Who can request HONcode certification?

Any health or medical website intended for patients, health care professionals or the general public.

- The request for certification is explicit and voluntary: Site administrators must take the initiative to apply for HONcode certification. Requests are made through the HON website.
http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/HONcode_membership.html

- Review and verification: Each request for certification is examined by a member of the HON team. HON makes a thorough visit of the site and verifies, according to detailed available guidelines, if all eight of the HONcode ethical principles are respected.
(See on the back "The eight HONcode Principles at a glance")



- Active certification: The site is certified by HON when the site not only complies with the HONcode principles but also demonstrates how each principle is implemented. A site which is found to respect the eight HONcode principles is given a unique dynamic seal to place on their pages.

- Regular monitoring: An certified site receives a check-up visit periodically, beginning one year after initial certification, in case of technical malfunction detected by our monitoring services or following a complaint.

Quality & Trustworthiness of the Medical & Health websites

HON was the first organisation to publish a voluntary code of conduct for online medical and health information known as the HONcode. HON is the only organisation enforcing its code through a formal application/certification process with annual auditing. This service is free of charge!

The HONcode of conduct is now a de facto standard for trustworthy online information used by thousands of health and medical web publishers. Its aims to protect citizens from false or misleading health or medical information. The HON approved websites provide a 'confidence-level' for the users to trust its content. It serves almost 6'500 websites.

The HONcode requires that information providers disclose the authority of the information provided, confidentiality and privacy policy, proper attribution of sources, transparency of financial sponsorship and relationship between advertising and editorial content.

All HON Services are freely available.

The eight HONcode Principles at a glance

Full version available at

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

Authority

If medical advice or information is given, the website must inform visitors if it is provided by a health professional or not, along with all relevant credentials.

Complementarity

A clear statement for its purpose to support, not replace, the doctor-patient relationship.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of data relating to individual patients and visitors to a medical/health website, is respected by this website.

Attribution

Refer properly to source information. The date when a clinical page was last modified will be clearly displayed.

Justifiability

Justify claims about benefits & performance of a specific treatment, commercial service or product.

Transparency of authorship

Identify site developers, authors & Webmaster and a valid contact address should be easily accessible.

Transparency of sponsorship

Present financial backers.

Honesty in advertising & editorial policy

Clearly separate advertising from editorial, if advertising is a funding source.

The certification is based on these eight principles

The need for certification of medical websites

Health information comes from a wide range of sources - friends and family, general print media, specialist print media, television and radio, and the Internet. Everyone is subjected to 'health information' all the time – some is absorbed passively, while some is actively sought out. A North American survey, conducted in July 2008, found that 76% of all adults have online access and 81% of those online have looked for healthcare information¹ at least once. In 2008, the number of users worldwide connected to the Internet reached 1.5 billion², an increase of 60% in a span of 8 years. In the European Union³, nearly half of all persons go online. Concurrent with this growing usage is the growing number of health web pages (1 billion results for the search term "health" on Google), available online. Protection of consumers by offering an easy access to trustworthy information is becoming a major importance. Of several options that have been proposed, the idea of a Code of Conduct respected by websites is the most widely accepted. To date, the HONcode covers 118 countries worldwide.

1. http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters/healthnews/HI_HealthCareNews2008Vol8_Iss8.pdf

2. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

3. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

Focus on the Press

Poor Quality Websites on CAM (*Complementary and Alternative Medicine*) dangerous for cancer patients⁴

"The cancer cures discussed on CAM websites are not supported by good scientific evidence," according to a study published in the Annals of Oncology conducted on the 32 most popular websites on CAM.

As an action plan, the study concludes that "cancer organisations and other impartial interest groups should investigate websites and create and administer a 'seal of approval', for safety and reliability, such as the HONcode".

4. <http://annonc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/15/5/733>

Health Information You Can TRUST: HONcode Toolbar

The HONcode Toolbar: easy access to trustworthy information.

This HON service allows easy searching for HON-certified sites about any medical or health subject, and automatically verifies the HONcode compliance of the site.



The HON toolbar is a free service supported by the Canton of Geneva, Swiss Government and the European Union.

Obtaining Reliable Medical Information Online: A one year Study Focusing on French-speaking Africa

Background information

Since its birth in 1989, the World Wide Web has grown like an inferno, and is now one of the major forms of information sources on every topic conceivable, including and especially, the health domain. This is far more so in developed countries like North America, Europe and Australia, where both health professionals and the general public have easy access to quality online information. However, in less developed continents like South America, Asia and Africa, where access to a computer is limited and the availability of online local information is limited; the Internet is far less popular as a source of information.

Objectives of the study

The study "**Obtaining Reliable Medical Information Online**" was carried out in French-speaking Africa, with special emphasis on Mali, to pinpoint the specific socio-cultural factors by which confidence in on-line medical content is built.

Description of the study

The year long project supported by the Geneva International Academic Network, in collaboration with the University of Geneva, the World Health Organization, the Graduate Institute of Development Studies, the Health On the Net Foundation and the Institute for Human Sciences of Mali focused, both on websites through evaluation and on health professionals through a socio-anthropological approach (discussions and questionnaires)

Complementary initiatives were also undertaken to draft recommendations for the compilation and evaluation of

on-line medical data that take into account socio-cultural and economic factors. Information drawn up in accordance with those recommendations would then be eligible for inclusion into the Global Health Library project of the World Health Organisation and be certified by the Health on the Net Foundation.

Methodology used

The two main methods used to gather information were:

- Information gathered from health professionals
This was based on eighty talks carried out in a sample of health professionals in Mali and Bamako from various health centres (teaching hospitals, health clinics, community health centres).
This data was complemented with data obtained from a questionnaire distributed at the beginning of the year (January 2007) in Bamako.
- Information gathered through website evaluation
Websites of French-speaking Africa were identified and then evaluated by reviewers of Health On the Net, Mali in Bamako using the structured questionnaire developed and applied by the HON Foundation to evaluate website compliance to the eight principles of the HONcode.

Observed results

Production of online medical information:

- Locally produced sites are limited due to the absence of a market for online health information. This is mainly due to the lack of economic interest in developing this area and also the poor level of trust of health professionals with respect to locally produced information.

- Few health professionals write material intended for the local market. In general, it was seen that medical specialists were interested in more specialized information produced in Western countries.

Access to online medical information:

- Information reliability is not perceived as an important factor, access to the Internet being the principal difficulty.

The lack of necessary infrastructure in certain establishments or medical departments constitutes the most important obstacle for the access of online medical information.

In two teaching hospitals, the number of connected computers as well as the quality of connection was seen to vary from one department to another, whereas in regional health centres and private clinics, it was usually non-existent.

- Adherence to editorial standards: In fact, a situation similar to that of Western countries 5 years ago was seen. The Internet is primarily used for general and anonymous reading, which also explains why, when judging by respect of the HONcode principles, there is very little importance given to confidentiality.

HONcode Principles	Africa** 2007*	Europe 2001*	Europe 2005*	Europe 2006*
Authoritative	93%	82.5%	87.3%	81.2%
Complementarity	68.6%	64%	81%	86%
Privacy	4.8%	53.6%	70%	75.3%
Attribution	94.3%	83.8%	90.8%	91.9%
Date	58.1%	61%	76.3%	79.7%
Justifiability	99%	97.9%	99.7%	99.7%
Transparency	96.2%	81.5%	98.2%	99%
Financial disclosure	77.2%	46.4%	72.5%	77%
Advertising policy	82.8%	38.9%	61.1%	74.4%

*Percentage of websites per principle respected
**French-speaking Africa

- Reliable and free information sources are not well known.

- Access to online medical information is also dependent on rank in the medical profession where there is a disparity of internet use. Those who use the Internet as an information source were seen to be mainly male medical specialists or researchers. This 'elite' group have almost unlimited access, whereas those more lowly, made up two more groups; those who have a limited access is made up of female medical specialists, general medical

officers and interns while those who have almost no access to the Internet are nurses, mid-wives and nurse assistants. Others with access to the Internet include librarians, those in charge of Internet cafés etc.

Recommendations

From these results, the following recommendations were made:

- Support production of information for a local audience through increase of local information publication using suitable local human resources and promotion of quality certification of sites.
- Diffusion of locally produced information onto a more international platform.
- Improve access to online information through stressing the importance of quality information, promotion of free online resources (MEDLINE, PubmedCentral, BioMedCentral, HINARI, Global Index Medicus, HON, CISMEF, Institute of the Scientific and Technical Information of CNRS), facilitation of access to groups identified to have limited or no online access and development of a technical infrastructure.

Conclusions

This study made it possible to explore several fields related to the production and the access of online information including the hurdles of quality information access, limitation through rank and sex and lack of necessary resources. It also highlighted the necessary changes to be made to improve conditions and provide better access to quality online medical information to health professionals in French-speaking Africa.

RUIG Panel Presentation

A panel presentation was organized by the Graduate Institute of Development Studies (IUED) and HON on 18th September in Geneva for the presentation of the results of the project amongst all participating organizations.

More information is accessible at:

- http://www.HealthOnNet.org/Projet_Afrique_FR/
- A detailed description of the study (available in French)
- http://www.HealthOnNet.org/Project/regio_ruig.html
- Details of the study in English
- <http://www.who.int/ghl/en/>
- Information about the Global Health Library

Health On the Net Foundation - Non Governmental Organization

HON Foundation is a non-governmental organization dedicated to improving the quality of information for patients and facilitating access to the most relevant and up-to-date medical discoveries for health professionals. Created in 1995 under the auspices of the Geneva Ministry of Health (DES), HON is internationally recognized for its pioneering work in the field of Online Health Information Quality.

International recognition

May 2004 - HON wins the European Union's eEurope Award for eHealth in the category "eHealth Information tools and services for citizens." This award, presented at a ministerial-level conference, recognized HON's innovative initiatives in the area of eHealth within Europe.

July 2002 - HON granted Special Consultative Status to United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in recognition of its international role, neutrality and expertise. HON has since taken part at UN meetings, most recently the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in December 2003.

Accomplishments

HONcode

The HONcode is an 8-point code of ethical conduct for online health and medical content providers. It is now in use by nearly 6,800 web sites from 118 countries which have voluntarily requested certification. The certified websites form a "confidence-space", where citizens could safely explore their medical information options, thanks to HONcodeHunt.

HON specialised search engines

Reliable sources of medical and health information with advanced yet user-friendly search engines and directories amongst which:



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

HONcodeHunt:

trustworthy websites adhering to the HONcode principles (includes large websites with thousands of web pages).



HONselect:
encyclopedia of 33,000 medical items in 7 languages, 17 million Medline articles, 52,000 ongoing clinical trials, 3,000 news sources

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

All our services are in French and English. The HONcode exists in 34 language.

Work conducted for European Union

European Union-funded research projects: The European Community shares HON Foundation's goals of consumer protection and access to medical information. HON leads or participates in consortia currently active on the following projects:

PIPS - This integrated project of the European Union's Sixth Framework programme involving 17 partners will help healthcare professionals deliver appropriate, just-in-time, personalised and prevention-focused services. In PIPS, HON shares its experience as a leader in quality certification for online health information.

WRAPIN - Next generation search engine determines trustworthiness of electronic documents of unfamiliar origin by comparing concepts, conclusions and references with known sources in reliable databases.

ActiveHealth - Within this project, HON has the responsibility of promoting a trustworthy European Space of health websites relating to Health Promotion & Disease Prevention (HPDP).

Facts

In november 2008, www.HealthOnNet.org was visited by more than one million people from 120 countries who consulted approximately 3,000,000 pages. HON serves 27,000 visits* per day, and serves nearly one page per second.

Address

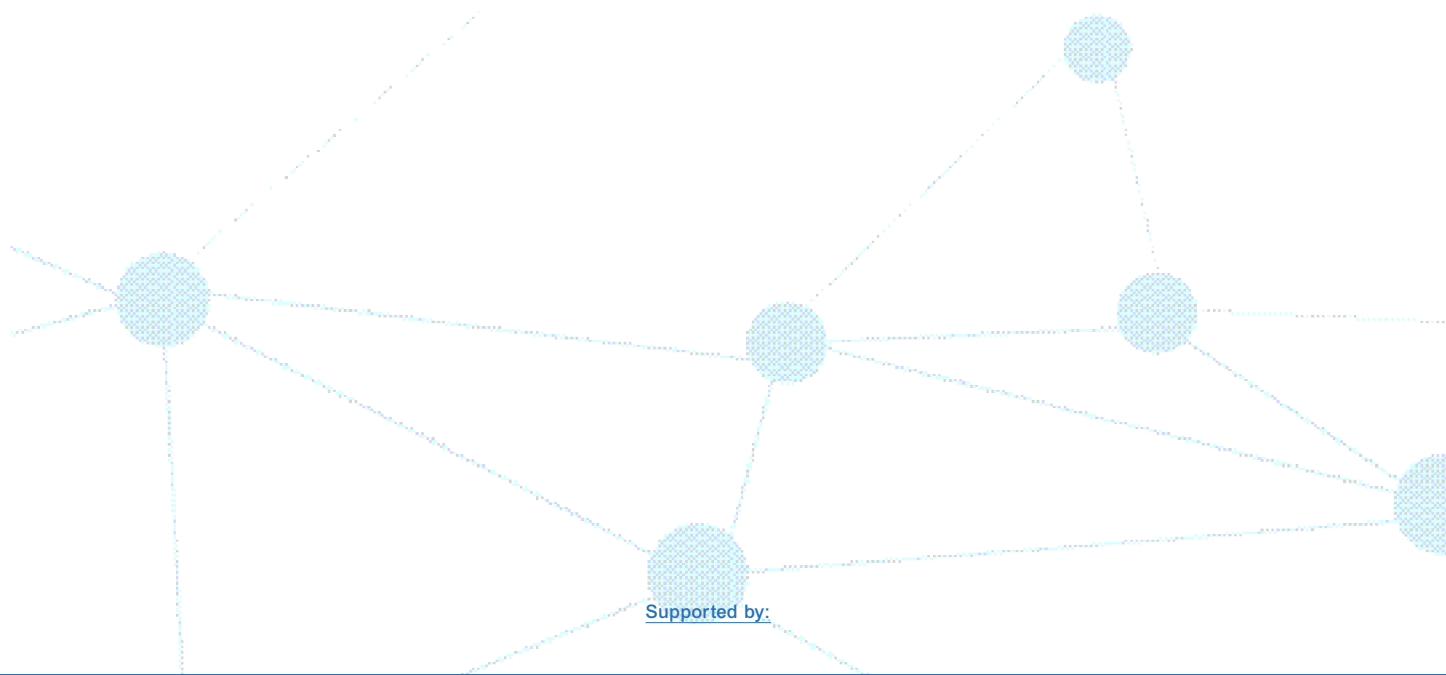
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* an IP address during one hour.



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