

Judge: Web Sites for Health. Consumer Guidelines

To help health consumers make informed choices about Web sites.

Based on the views of health consumers and support groups.

Author:

- Sue Childs, Research Fellow, Information Management Research Institute (IMRI), School of Informatics, Northumbria University (now Information, Knowledge and Systems Research Group, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences (<http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/ceis/re/isrc/>)).

Project managers:

- Diane Barnett, Information Officer (retired), Contact a Family (<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>);
- Dr Graham Walton, Research Fellow, Information Management Research Institute (IMRI) (now Service Development Manager, Loughborough University Library).

Collaborator and Web site developer:

- Kay Humphrey, Web Manager (Kay Humphrey was employed by the Centre for Health Information Quality (now closed) when this Web site was produced).

© Copyright for this site is held by Contact a Family and the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University.

Site published February 2003. Last updated December 2009. Review date December 2010.

CONTENTS PAGE

	Section	Page no:
1	How to search the Internet for health information	4
1.1	Information searching	4
1.2	Gateways – searchable catalogues to good quality health Web sites	5
1.3	Search engines	6
1.4	Search tips	7
1.5	Confidence building – learning how to search	7
2	How to judge the quality of a Web site	9
2.1	Trust and reputation	9
2.2	Who produced the site	10
2.3	Purpose of the site	11
2.4	Funding sources	11
2.5	Date	12
2.6	How the information is written	12
2.7	Descriptions of conditions and treatments	13
2.8	Medical research	14
2.9	Personal experiences	15
2.10	Foreign sites	15
2.11	Communication	16
2.12	Links	16
2.13	Disclaimers	17
2.14	Kitemarks	17
2.15	Design	19
2.16	Interactive facilities – e-mail lists, bulletin boards, chat rooms	20
2.17	Other guidelines	21
3	How to manage information in partnership with health professionals	22
	About Judge	23

CONSUMER GUIDELINES

These guidelines aim to help health consumers make informed choices about Web sites. They are arranged in three main sections.

- How to search the Internet for health information
- How to judge the quality of a Web site
- How to manage information in partnership with health professionals

1. HOW TO SEARCH THE INTERNET FOR HEALTH INFORMATION

This section gives advice on how to search the Internet for health information.

The contents of this section are listed below.

- Information searching
- Gateways - searchable catalogues to good quality health Web sites
- Search engines
- Search tips
- Confidence building - learning how to search

1.1 Information searching

Time spent searching is not wasted. This is how you develop your critical skills and identify sites you can trust.

The process of looking for information is important. It helps many people adjust to their condition.

There are stages to a condition. Different types of information may be needed at these different stages.

- Before a diagnosis:
 - (a) to work out what the problem is.
- Just after a diagnosis:
 - (a) to find out why it has happened;
 - (b) to find anything that might help.
- Later on in the condition:
 - (a) to focus on the things that work for you;
 - (b) to find more detailed information;
 - (c) to read the medical research literature.

At all these stages, making contact with a support group for your condition can be very helpful. So search the Internet for the sites of national or local support groups.

Support groups can offer the following help.

- Provide emotional and personal support:
 - (a) from people who have had personal experience of the condition and so understand;
 - (b) by putting you in contact with other people with the same condition and their carers.

- Provide information:
 - (a) of good quality;
 - (b) easy to understand;
 - (c) made readily available, for example through leaflets, Web sites, newsletters;
 - (d) covering specialised, medical topics, for example rare conditions;
 - (e) explaining the medical research literature.
- Advise about information:
 - (a) how and where to get information;
 - (b) what is good quality information.
- Act as a link between the patient or carer and the professional.
- Fight the patient or carer's corner.

Professionals can also provide information:

- the contact details of a support group;
- an information leaflet.

People you can ask include:

- staff at your public library;
- your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) in hospitals;
- health care staff.

1.2 Gateways

Try a health gateway first. These provide free access to a catalogue of health and medical Internet sites. You can look for information under subject sections, or search the gateway using keywords.

Some examples of health gateways are listed below.

- NHS Choices (<http://www.nhs.uk/>)
NHS Choices is produced by the NHS. It provides information about NHS services, healthy living and treatments and conditions.
- NHS Direct (<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>)
NHS Direct Online is produced by the NHS. It provides high quality health information and advice. You can also make an online enquiry, or telephone a 24 hour nurse advice and information helpline.
- Contact a Family (<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>)
Contact a Family produces a directory of conditions affecting adults and children. The directory gives a medical description of the condition, followed

by details of support groups. There is also a helpline service. Contact a Family is a UK charity which helps families who care for children with any disability or special need. They are a main source of information about rare disorders and are able to assist affected adults as well as children.

- Patient UK (<http://www.patient.co.uk>)
Patient UK is a directory to health Web sites in the UK. It contains information about conditions, support groups, books and journals, and locations of GP practices and hospitals. Patient information leaflets are also available. It is a free site edited by two GPs.
- Intute: Medicine including dentistry (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/healthandlifesciences/medicine/>)
This is "a free online service providing you with access to the very best web resources for education and research, evaluated and selected by a network of subject specialists
- NHS Evidence Health Information Resources (<http://www.library.nhs.uk/>)
NHS Evidence Health Information Resources website (formerly the National Library for Health - NLH) is produced by the NHS. It contains good quality information that provides the evidence for health care. Though aimed at the health professional, most of the site is freely available to the public too.
- MEDLINEplus (<http://medlineplus.gov>)
MEDLINEplus is produced by the US government. It provides information on conditions, a medical encyclopaedia and medical dictionaries. For every condition covered, you can click on a link to MEDLINE for a pre-set search of recent research articles.
- MEDLINE (<http://www.pubmed.gov>)
MEDLINE is produced by the US government. It is the top database to the international medical research literature. It is available free on the Web.

1.3 Search engines

Use search engines if you cannot find what you want from the gateways. These give you lists of a large number of sites. However these sites have not been checked for quality as search engines index the Web automatically. Even if a site is high up in the list of search results it may not answer your question.

Choice of a search engine depends on personal taste and which is currently considered the best.

1. Google (<http://www.google.co.uk>)
- AllTheWeb (<http://www.alltheweb.com>)

- Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>)
Yahoo also includes a directory where human editors have organised Web sites under sections, including 'Health'.
- MedHunt (<http://www.hon.ch/>)
MedHunt is a medical search engine provided by the Health On the Net Foundation (HON), a not-for-profit International Swiss Organisation.

If you want to find out about individual search engines and what they do go to Phil Bradley's Finding information: search engines (<http://www.philb.com/whichengine.htm>).

1.4 Search tips

Unless your search is very simple, always use the 'advanced search' option provided by the search engine. This is normally a link near to the search box on the home page. 'Advanced search' allows you to do things like:

- Find results with all of the words you type in your query. This makes it much more likely to find relevant sites and to cut down on the number of results;
- Find results with the exact phrase, by putting the words in quote marks "...". This is very useful when looking for names of diseases, organisations, people;
- Choose the language, for example English.

The Help pages will give you details about how to use the search engine and how to search more efficiently.

If you use only one or two search engines then time spent in reading their Help pages will be well worth it.

When using other search tools like gateways and directories look at their Help pages too.

1.5 Confidence building

If you want to build your confidence in using the Internet look for taster sessions or short courses at local organisations like public libraries, the WEA (Workers' Educational Association), further education colleges or universities. However there may be a small fee for courses.

Public libraries provide free access to the Internet.

The following sites provide free online tutorials for developing Internet skills. They are produced by the higher education sector in the UK.

- The Online Netskills Interactive Course - TONIC (<http://www.netskills.ac.uk/onlinecourses/tonic>)
TONIC is free but users have to register so their progress can be followed and they can be given feedback.
- Intute: Virtual Training Suite (<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/>)
These online tutorials are designed to help people improve their Internet information literacy and IT skills. No registration is required, and you can use them at your own pace with no monitoring.

2. HOW TO JUDGE THE QUALITY OF A WEB SITE

This section lists the things to look for that will help you judge if a Web site is of good quality.

The following is a list of the contents of this section.

- Trust and reputation
- Who produced the site
- Purpose of the site
- Funding sources
- Date
- How the information is written
- Descriptions of conditions and treatments
- Medical research
- Personal experiences
- Foreign sites
- Communication
- Links
- Disclaimers
- Kitemarks
- Design
- Interactive facilities - e-mail lists, bulletin boards, chat rooms
- Other guidelines

Quality and usefulness are not the same thing. A site may be of good quality but not contain any information that is useful to you at the moment.

The general principles in this section will help you decide if a site is of good quality or not. However decisions on usefulness are personal.

2.1 Trust and reputation

In normal life we make judgments based on our trust in an organisation or an individual. This is true of Web sites too, for example:

- the Web site of a well-known, reputable organisation;
- the Web site of an organisation you already know and trust;
- Web sites recommended by a health professional;
- Web sites recommended by a support group.

Developing your knowledge about the reputation of organisations and sites is a matter of experience. You need to search widely and get to know the types of sites available.

2.2 Who produced the site

Web sites are produced for many different purposes and reasons and by many different types of organisation, as well as by individuals, for example:

- professional organisations, such as universities, hospitals;
- support groups, ranging from big national charities to small, local groups;
- government departments like the Department of Health;
- commercial organisations, selling health care products or services;
- individuals:
 - (a) a medical researcher;
 - (b) a person suffering from a condition, or a carer of such a person.

Be more cautious of information in:

- commercial sites, as their main purpose is to sell something not to inform or educate;
- individual patient or carer's sites, particularly the medical information as there is a chance it could be incorrect.

Information provided by the Web address can also tell you what type of organisation has produced the site.

Look at the first part of the Web address (the domain name), between `http://` and the first `/`, for example:

- `http://www.cafamily.org.uk/`
- `http://omni.ac.uk/`

This 'domain name' is the unique name which identifies that organisation on the Internet. The codes at the end represent the type of organisation and its country of origin.

Common organisational codes include:

- `.com` (for commercial organisations);
- `.edu` (for educational organisations);
- `.gov` (for governments);
- `.org` (for organisations, usually non-commercial).

Country codes, for example:

- no code (for the USA);
- `.au` (for Australia);
- `.int` (for international);
- `.uk` (for the UK).

Second level codes, for example:

- .ac.uk (for educational organisations in the UK);
- .co.uk (for commercial organisations in the UK);
- .org.uk (for non-commercial organisation in the UK).

The name of the organisation producing the site should be clear and obvious on every page.

Full details about the organisation should be given. Look in sections such as "About us" and "Contact us". They should include, where applicable:

- contact details:
 - (a) name of organisation;
 - (b) postal address;
 - (c) telephone number;
 - (d) fax number;
 - (e) e-mail address.
- location:
 - (a) map;
 - (b) details of how to reach the organisation by car and public transport;
 - (c) opening hours.
- charitable status:
 - (a) registered charity number.
- list of staff:
- list of other people involved, for example Management Committee, Medical Advisory Panel, Editorial Board.

2.3 Purpose of the site

The site should be clear and honest about its purpose. This enables you to assess any potential bias in the information provided.

- Who are the intended audience?
- How was the site developed?
 - (a) Were health consumers involved, and how?

Look in sections such as 'About us' or 'Mission' for this information.

2.4 Funding sources

The sources of funding for the organisation and site should be clear. For charitable organisations look at sections like 'How you can help'.

If the organisation is a registered charity it should give its registered charity number. It should give details of its accounts and annual reports on the site too.

- Purpose and financial information for registered charities can be seen on the Charity Commission's Web site (<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>).

Any items for sale should be clearly stated as such. The price and the method of payment should be given.

Any organisations or individuals sponsoring the site should be listed.

- Be cautious of sites sponsored by, for example pharmaceutical or medical product companies.

Where sponsors are not listed, do not assume that the site is not sponsored.

- If a site does not accept sponsorship it should say so.

When adverts are used it should be obvious that they are an advert. The types of adverts accepted by a site could give you some indication of its potential bias.

2.5. Date

The site should be kept up to date.

- Look for the date the site was last updated or reviewed, for example on the Home page.

The information within the site should be kept up to date.

- On each page look for the date the information was written and when it was last updated or reviewed.
- Some information, like the description of a disease, does not change very much. However it should be reviewed on a regular basis, for example yearly, to check that it is still correct.

2.6 How the information is written

Information should be up to date.

Information should be balanced:

- it should discuss different sides of an issue;
- it should not be sensational;
- it should not make extreme statements or extravagant claims.

Information should be written with correct grammar and spelling.

Many sites are aimed at health professionals, lecturers and researchers, not the health consumer. Therefore they will use specialised language.

Where sites are aimed at health consumers, the information should be simply written, easy to understand, with no medical jargon. When medical terms are used a glossary should be given so you can find out what these terms mean.

If you want to look up computing or medical terms there are online dictionaries you can use, for example:

- Free On-line Dictionary of Computing, Editor Denis Howe (<http://www.foldoc.org>)
- The Free Dictionary, produced by Farlex (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>)

Information should be written so it is accessible to the disabled.

If the site is targeting groups with a first-language other than English, it might be appropriate for information to be provided in those languages as well.

2.7 Descriptions of conditions and treatments

There are two levels to judging the quality of this medical information.

First level

The first level looks for the presence of quality principles which indicate that the information is likely to be reliable. This type of judgment can be carried out by anybody.

- The name of the author, with the reasons why you should trust what they have written, for example their job title, place of work, formal qualifications.
- Any potential conflicts of interest, for example if the researcher is funded by a pharmaceutical company.
- The date the information was written, with an update or review date.
(a) Some information, like the description of a disease, does not change very much. However it should be reviewed on a regular basis, for example yearly, to check that it is still correct.
- The sources of the information the author used to write their section, for example:
(a) references to the literature;
(b) links to other Web sites (and the dates they were accessed);

(c) the author's knowledge and experience.

- Contact details of the author so you can check up on the information and query it.
- Links to related resources so you can read other opinions and look at other research.

There should be a section that describes any quality checks or editorial processes that information goes through before it is placed on the site.

However, even when these quality principles are followed by a site, there is still no guarantee that their information is correct.

One approach to help identify correct information is to look at a range of sites and note areas of agreement.

Second level

The second level involves a detailed assessment of the correctness of the information. This can only be done by a health professional or a lay-expert.

- A lay-expert is a member of the public, often a patient or a carer, who has spent a lot of time reading and learning about a specific medical condition. They can know as much about this small area of medicine as some health professionals.
- Some support groups are sources of lay-experts so contact them for further help.

2.8 Medical research

The medical research literature is very complex. You would need specialised knowledge of the subject, the scientific methods used and the terminology to be able to understand it fully.

The nature and strength of science is in debate. Scientists test and challenge each others' work until they reach agreement. This approach is very powerful at building up knowledge and understanding. However it is not helpful or comfortable for the health consumer looking for certainty, for example:

- a piece of work can be out of date, overtaken by further research;
- experts can have different opinions about the research;
- professional advice can vary between different countries;
- some researchers' ideas can be at odds with the usual opinion.

Many support groups use medical advisers to check the medical information they provide.

Some support groups cover research on their Web sites or through their newsletters.

2.9 Personal experiences

Personal experiences are important sources of help and information. They can appear as sections in a support group site. They can be the purpose for an individual patient or carer setting up their own Web site.

Personal experiences should be clearly marked as such.

You should be cautious about individual patient or carer sites, particularly where they give medical information. Check the accuracy of that information carefully.

- See if the description of their personal experience matches with yours.
- See how they deal with a fact, particularly a controversial one, where you know the correct answer.
- See if they give references to the sources of the medical information they provide.

2.10 Foreign sites

There are many good non-UK sites. However there are a number of problems with the information they contain:

- different health systems and cultural practices;
- use of different terminology;
- recommending different treatments;
- different availability of treatments and drugs.

It is not always obvious that a Web site is not in the UK, or that you could be e-mailing someone abroad.

You can usually tell what type of organisation has produced the site, and in which country, by looking at the first part of the Web address (the domain name) between `http://` and the first `/`, for example:

- `http://www.cafamily.org.uk/`
- `http://omni.ac.uk/`

This 'domain name' is the unique name which identifies that organisation on the Internet. The codes at the end represent the type of organisation and its country of origin.

Common organisational codes include:

- .com (for commercial organisations);
- .edu (for educational organisations);
- .gov (for governments);
- .org (for organisations, usually non-commercial).

Country codes, for example:

- no code (for the USA);
- .au (for Australia);
- .int (for international);
- .uk (for the UK).

Second level codes, for example:

- .ac.uk (for educational organisations in the UK);
- .co.uk (for commercial organisations in the UK);
- .org.uk (for non-commercial organisation in the UK).

2.11 Communication

Methods to make contact with the organisation should be available, for example an e-mail address, a postal address, a phone number, electronic forms.

Look for any limits placed on this communication.

- Are phone helplines only staffed for fixed time periods?
 - (a) Can you leave messages on an answerphone?
 - (b) Will you receive a reply?
 - (c) How many days before you can expect an answer?
- Are e-mail support services only staffed for fixed time periods?
 - (a) Will you receive a reply?
 - (b) How many days before you can expect an answer?

Communication is a particular strength of support group sites. Professional and government sites are far less likely to provide personal communication.

You also need to be able to contact the Web site manager, to report technical problems and to provide comments about the site.

2.12 Links

Links to other Web sites can be useful sources of information.

The site should explain why they have chosen these links and how they judged the quality of the sites they are linking to.

It should be made clear that you are linking to another site, for example:

- a message saying you are leaving the current site;
- a new browser window opening when you click on the link.

2.13 Disclaimers

Web sites should give details of their terms and conditions of use and include disclaimers. These should cover issues such as:

Medical information

- Use of a Web site is not intended to replace consultation with your own doctor.

Privacy

- They should say how they will handle any information you send them.
- They must keep your personal information secure and confidential.
- They must tell you if their site automatically collects information when you access it, for example if they use cookies.

Copyright

- The organisation producing the site holds the copyright to information on the site.
- They may give you permission to make and use copies.

Statements that they cannot guarantee the information they provide and are not responsible for any problems you might encounter or harm you might be caused

This could cover, for example:

- the accuracy and availability of information on their site;
- the quality, and availability, of information on the Web sites they link to;
- downloading a computer virus.

Legal statements about terms and conditions of use

If you continue to use the site you are accepting these terms and conditions.

2.14 Kitemarks

You may see a kitemark on a site. Kitemarks are signs or logos indicating that the Web site has been 'endorsed' in some way by another organisation.

Kitemarks can mean many different things. They do not necessarily mean that the health information is correct. A kitemark could just mean that in someone's view the site is well designed.

The absence of a kitemark is not a sign of poor quality. Only a minority of sites apply for them.

Look at the Web site of the endorsing organisation.

- What are their aims?
- What criteria did they use to 'judge' the Web site?
- Who made these judgements?

Some common kitemarks are:

- Health On the Net Foundation code (HONcode)
(<http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html>):
(a) HON is a not-for-profit International Swiss Organisation. It has produced a set of eight ethical principles, the HONcode, which Web site producers should abide by;
(b) however it does not rate the quality of the information provided by a Web site;
(c) approved organisations can place an active logo on their site. When you click on this logo you see a page on the HON site which tells you if they still endorse that Web site;
- Department of Health, Information Standard
(<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/PatientChoice/BetterInformationChoicesHealth/Informationstandard/index.htm>)
This scheme, about to be launched, will 'kitemark' health information providers.
- Bobby (<http://www.mardiros.net/bobby-accessibility-tool.html>)
(a) Bobby is a software tool that Web site producers can use to check that their site is accessible to people with disabilities;
(b) it does not assess the information content.
- 'Best Web site' awards:
(a) there are a number of organisations that present 'Best Web site' awards;
(b) the principles used to judge sites vary between these awards and can be subjective;
(c) the presence of such an award cannot guarantee the accuracy of the health information on a Web site.
- Some examples of 'Best Web site' awards are:
(a) British Medical Association (BMA) Patient Information Award
(http://www.bma.org.uk/whats_on/offers_and_competitions/LIBBMAPatientInformationAward.jsp);

(b) Plain English Campaign Internet Crystal Mark
(<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/crystal-mark/internet-crystal-mark.html>).

2.15 Design

Good site design is encouraging, but it should not be used as the only or the main reason for judging the quality of a site.

Design covers the following issues.

Privacy

The Data Protection Act covers the use of personal data, which is anything that could identify a living person. Any organisation collecting personal data through their Web site (or by other means) must obey this law. They must:

- explain that they are obtaining personal data and what they are using it for. If the data is 'sensitive' (for example information about ethnicity, health or disabilities) they must ask your permission first;
- only use this data for the reason they give;
- only ask for data that is relevant and necessary;
- ensure the data is correct and up-to-date. You can ask to see your data and correct it;
- only keep data as long as it is necessary. When it is no longer needed, or is out of date, it should be deleted;
- abide by your rights;
- keep data confidential and secure;
- not transfer data outside the EU.

The Information Commissioner's Office (<http://www.ico.gov.uk/>) oversees the Data Protection Act.

Usability

The site should be:

- usable by people with a disability;
- easy to find information in the site;
- easy to read, for example the size and colour of the text.

Accessibility

The site should be:

- accessible to people with a disability;
- easy to access, no matter what type of computer or browser someone is using;
- quick to download;

- not use unnecessary special software.

Discreet use of adverts

Appearance

The site should:

- be attractive;
- only use graphics when necessary;
- not use unnecessary special software, such as moving images.

Advice on Web site design

There are many sites that provide advice on good design, for example:

- Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
(http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/webaccessibility/Pages/web_accessibility.aspx) Web access centre
RNIB is the leading UK charity offering practical support and advice to anyone with a sight problem.
- Plain English tips for clear websites
(<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/websitesguide.pdf>)

2.16 Interactive facilities

The more interactive facilities of the Web include social networking sites, chat rooms, e-mail lists, bulletin boards. They also need quality checking.

Most of the people using these facilities are genuine and extremely helpful and supportive.

But be wary of:

- people who may be bitter because of their experiences;
- people with extreme views;
- people who criticise others;
- new patients or carers recommending treatments that experienced people know don't work;
- people with an obsession about a particular issue;
- and very rarely, people who pretend to have a condition or a sick child because they want emotional support.

Quality controls on interactive facilities include:

- experienced members, who respond when incorrect information is broadcast;

- the use of Netiquette – rules of polite, supportive behaviour on the Internet;
- moderators who help the discussions stay supportive and within the rules. Moderators delete or modify inappropriate messages, educate newcomers about the group's rules, and ban offenders from the group;
- closed lists, where registration is required.

2.17 Other guidelines

Here are some examples. There are many more.

- Intute Collection Development Framework and Policy
(http://www.intute.ac.uk/supportdocs/IntuteCDFPJuly2009_final.pdf)
The health information gateway, Intute: Medicine including dentistry (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/healthandlifesciences/medicine/>) is part of Intute (produced by the higher education sector). These guidelines explain how Intute evaluates Internet resources for inclusion in their gateway.
- Health on the Net Foundation code (HONcode)
(<http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html>)
HON is a not-for-profit International Swiss Organisation. It has produced a set of eight ethical principles, the HONcode, which Web site producers should abide by. However it does not rate the quality of the information provided by a Web site.

And one site aimed at children:

- QUICK – The QUality Information CheckList
(<http://www.avon.k12.ct.us/enrichment/Enrich/quickgr4-0.htm>)

3. HOW TO MANAGE INFORMATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

You may want to ask your doctor about a piece of medical research you have found or request a particular therapy or drug you have seen on the Internet.

Please think carefully about how you do this. Doctors are very busy and the consultation is very short.

Make the best use of this short consultation time by:

- selecting one piece of high quality information, from a professional medical source:
 - (a) written by a doctor or medical researcher;
 - (b) with the author's name and details and the date;
 - (c) with details of the source where you found this, and the Web address.
- taking this to the consultation:
 - (a) or send the information in advance so the doctor has time to read it.

Rather than taking Internet information to the doctor first, think about talking it over with an advice worker in a support group.

- Support groups often use medical staff for advice about the medical research literature.
- Support groups often cover the research literature on their Web sites or in their newsletters.
- Their advice workers will know about current research.

However support groups cannot replace consultation with your own doctor.

ABOUT JUDGE

The Judge project has developed guidelines for judging the quality of health information Web sites.

Two sets of guidelines have been produced:

- to help health consumers make informed choices about Web sites:
Judge: Web Sites for Health. Consumer Guidelines;
- to assist support groups to produce good quality Web sites:
Judge: Web Sites For Health. Support Group Guidelines.

The Judge project was developed in partnership between:

- Contact a Family (<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>) the national charity dedicated to helping families who care for children with any disability or special need;
- Information Management Research Institute (IMRI), School of Informatics, Northumbria University (now Information Management Innovation Research Group, School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences
(<http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/ceis/re/isrc/>));

The project was supported by the PPP Foundation (now Health Foundation).

The Centre for Health Information Quality (now closed) developed this Web site in collaboration with IMRI.

A Steering Group advised the project. Its members were from:

- The Alzheimer's Society (<http://www.alzheimers.org.uk>);
- The Centre for Health information Quality (CHIQ) (now closed);
- The National electronic Library for Health (NeLH) (now NHS Evidence Health Information Resources website (<http://www.library.nhs.uk/>));
- The National Information Forum (<http://www.nif.org.uk>);
- Organising Medical Networked Information (OMNI) (now Intute: Health Medicine including dentistry
(<http://www.intute.ac.uk/healthandlifesciences/medicine/>));
- Patient UK (<http://www.patient.org.uk>).

The project has resulted in a number of published journal articles:

- Childs S (2005). Judging the quality of Internet-based health information. *Performance Measurement and Metrics*, 6(2):80-96
- Childs S (2004). Developing health web site quality assessment guidelines for the voluntary sector: Outcomes from the Judge project. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 21(Suppl 2):14-26

Disclaimer

The information in these guidelines was written by an information professional, based on the views of health consumers and support groups. It does not contain medical information. If you have a medical question please contact your doctor.

Although obtaining information from the Internet can be very helpful, it is not a replacement for consulting your own doctor, but additional to the information and advice they provide.

We have taken care in the production of these guidelines. However we cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. We cannot be responsible for any loss, damage or expense that might be caused by any action, or lack of action, that a person might take as a result of reading these guidelines. Responsibility for such actions, or lack of actions, remains with the reader concerned.

We have provided the Web addresses of external Web sites but we have no responsibility for these sites. We cannot guarantee the quality of their information, or if they are still accessible. We do not endorse any product or service.

Copyright

The copyright of these guidelines is held by Contact a Family and the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences, Northumbria University.

You can copy and reproduce these guidelines without asking permission, as long as you credit us as the author and publisher.

Feedback

To make comments about this resource you can contact the author, Sue Childs, at:

Sue Childs, Research Fellow
School of Computing, Engineering and Information Sciences
Pandon Building
Northumbria University
Camden St
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK
sue.childs@northumbria.ac.uk

We will respond to your comments promptly and we will use them to review the design / content of this resource. Your comments will then be deleted.

This resource follows the requirements of the United Kingdom's Data Protection Act on the use of personal data. Your comments will be kept secure and confidential and will only be used by resource staff. We will not keep or use any of your personal information.

This resource does not provide medical information and we cannot answer medical questions. If you have a medical question please contact your doctor.