

## The conception, inception, and post partum development of a substance misuse information portal <<http://www.dailydose.net>>

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*A description of the setting up and running of the Web sites 'Daily Dose', 'substancemisuse.net' and 'Drugs in Sport', covering drug and alcohol misuse news and information.*

One can immediately empathise with the travails experienced by anyone attempting to trawl for information on the Internet. There are various search engines out there that offer help by providing either general grazing, or a more refined menu for the specialist. Our solution to the problem of 'information overload' has taken a different approach and we have developed a specialised information portal – in this case for drug and alcohol misuse – which publishes news and reports twice daily.

Attempting to establish a personal library of Internet bookmarks to serve as a knowledge resource for any particular discipline can become a monster that gobbles up the very time it is intended to save. Suggested Web links on each of the sites visited proffer even more links, which thereby proliferate like a capillary network. A lineage is pursued only to encounter familiar links reappearing in a recursive gyration that stretches one's retention threshold to the limit. Slowly but surely, a critical mass of quality bookmarks emerges that does coalesce into a useful facility.

However, this list of bookmarks can become quite long and each site still needs to be revisited frequently in the search for new material. Also, on each subsequent visit to a site, superfluous information has to be scan read before it can be discarded. All this can take more time than the busy professional is able to commit. So where does one go from here? Having experienced nirvana, but without the time to meditate, one is left unfulfilled.

Electronic news gatherers attempt to circumvent this problem but they are a catch-all for good, bad or indifferent information, and

although they may well supply a reduced list, it is often too long for immediate assimilation.

We have discovered that the introduction of the human touch into this sintering process enables the smelter to produce some precious metal and very little dross.

Here's how '**Daily Dose**' was conceived, nurtured, steered through pubescent rebellion to emerge as a sophisticated resource.

The precursors for '**Daily Dose**' came together two years ago in Swansea, Wales. Professor David Clark (Director), Ash Whitney (Webmaster) and myself (Information Researcher) shared an ambition to develop a news portal that would help 'raise awareness and understanding of substance misuse, the problems it creates and the ways to deal with these problems'. The fundamental purpose of an information portal is to present the reader with customised news and reports that will enable them to access information on the Internet without the need to spend endless hours trawling themselves.

Our first priority was to establish a working library of bookmarks and this task took quite some time. Starting with a small number of Web addresses returned from a search engine inquiry, I set about interrogating the links presented on each site, and then evaluating the links recommended on those sites, *ad infinitum*. After just a few 'clicks' this exploded exponentially and it was only with some sixth sense that I kept track of this miasma. With brutal pruning this was pared down to a working list. Over the past two years, other sites have been added as they were encountered during my twice-daily trawls and others have been discarded as dry wells.

Once we had this resource, a Web site needed to be developed and this is where a talented (and dedicated) Webmaster is essential. Ash Whitney <<http://www.wiredupwales.com/index.htm>> designed the Web pages to present the information coming from the Internet and we were all involved in criticising the product. The most important requirement was for easy navigation and the selection of fonts and colours that made for easy reading.

Fine, what a lovely baby – coochy, coochy, coo – but the blighter has kept us up day and night ever since!

Every morning and evening we trawl for information, and headlines of pertinent articles are copy/pasted into Dreamweaver along with an introduction. The URL to link to the original article is hyperlinked on to the headline and the whole publication is loaded on to the server twice daily at midnight and 07:30 GMT. We decided early on to archive all the articles and reports, so this has to be shuffled on the server also.

Since launch, our site has achieved excellent search engine prominence. This has been achieved by our Webmaster's efforts at submitting details to a wide range of search engines. It may be fame (or infamy) but we now are ranked number one out of 920,000 returns on Google (using the phrase '**Daily Dose**') having forced Star Wars into second place! We also take every opportunity to write to Web sites, organisations and individuals when they are encountered on the Internet. In this way, we have attracted a dedicated and professional audience. I never let an opportunity pass to e-mail

# He@lth Information on the Internet

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information about 'Daily Dose' and, although it is very time consuming, it has led to a network of contacts and readers that are our life-blood.

Fairly soon after we launched, we were asked to supply publications by e-mail whereby our subscribers could read 'Daily Dose' immediately from their in-box without having to open a browser. This also has expanded quickly and we are now approaching 1000 subscribers. These subscribers range from Central Government, Local Government, Criminal Justice, National Health Service, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) Europe, ONDCP White House USA, Treatment Agencies, Charities, etc.

Q: *Why do our readers keep coming back for more?*

A: Because the information we provide is relevant to their needs.

Q: *How do we know?*

A: Because by browsing our core bookmarks day in day out we have developed an empathy with our readers.

Q: *How can we trust the Web sites we refer our readers to?*

A: Because we visit mainstream professional organisations, governments or media outlets to locate the information.

Our **Weekly Dose** and **Monthly News** sections further refine access to this information. **Weekly News** is a collection of the best articles and reports from the previous week, while **Monthly News** allocates the most important articles from the previous month into categories for GPs and Medical Workers, Criminal Justice, Policy Makers, Drug and Alcohol Treatment Workers.

The visitor statistics for 'Daily Dose' currently stand at 8 million hits per annum and over 800,000 unique visitors per annum. These are probably gross underestimates due to cache anomalies.

On a personal note, I would say that to scroll down a list of 1000 subscribers and know that each day these people open their editions of 'Daily Dose' to enjoy the feast I have

prepared for them, rewards me with a strange feeling of worthiness that has an exquisite piquancy. It is what keeps me going.

If we can achieve this for our particular field, then I am convinced it can be repeated for portals supplying information to other health care niches – given a similar dedication and energy.

It had always been our intention to develop a high quality Web site to show what we could do before looking for funding. However, such has been our success that we are now forced to divert our limited time to the search for substantial funding. This search will be directed towards the private and public sectors, as well as charitable organisations. All our development has been achieved by a dedicated team who have worked part-time whilst holding down full-time jobs. Small-scale funding was initially supplied by the Welsh Development Agency but unfortunately there is no avoiding the necessity of dividing our time between creative works and fund-raising activities. As soon as finances will allow, a business/promotional/fund-raising manager will be sought.

There are no charges to use the WIRED Web sites. There are three ways that the WIRED team will initially be trying to attract funding to further this service. First, and most importantly, we aim to attract public and private funding (sponsorship) for the core WIRED team. Second, we will encourage collaborative projects with others, submitting joint applications. Third, we will conduct consultancy work via Professor Clark's consultancy, and the Web design and hosting company 'Wired up Wales'.

We recognise that we need to be flexible with funding models. We intend that the main core service for the general public will be kept free-of-charge, but hope to develop a specialised service for different practitioner groups on a subscription basis. We are also likely to charge for specialised training material in the future. We will need to explore all possibilities at various times in the future – our main aim is to ensure that the highest quality material reaches the most people. It

would be good if it all could be free – but we need to cover the costs of the service (which won't be low).

Our efforts with 'Daily Dose' form one part of the WIRED Initiative <<http://www.wiredinitiative.com/index.htm>>. WIRED aims to help individuals, families and communities tackle substance misuse and the problems it causes. It is using advances in information technology, and expertise from a variety of backgrounds, to develop new resources of research, information, training, education and support.

A few months after 'Daily Dose' was weaned, the team developed a sibling site, 'substance misuse.net' <<http://www.substance misuse.net>>. Our long-term strategy had always been that 'substance misuse.net' would become the main site of the WIRED initiative. This site moved away from the focused news portal mission of 'Daily Dose' and is designed to provide a wider range of material including, original articles written by our staff. Professor Clark initiated the writing of the original content for the site and, along with Ash Whitney, designed the customised structure dedicated to: General Public, Practitioners, Problem Users, and Wales. Our two other team members who write articles are Rebecca Hancock (who has written some quality personal experiences of users, and project profiles) and Anni Stonebridge. Rebecca is a researcher with Professor Clark and Anni was formerly the Performance Manager of the North Wales Drug and Alcohol Forum but has now moved to Scotland. WIRED has a strong community research programme, an example of which was the project: 'How do general practitioners feel about being involved in managing substance misuse problems?' <<http://www.substance misuse.net/practitioners/pfeatures/003/gpsurvey.pdf>>.

**There is no other problem that impacts on so many different aspects of society than substance misuse. Therefore, there is an urgent need for high quality information flow and a forum for discussion.**

Continued from p6

WIRED will hopefully become a major force in helping improve treatment, prevention and policy. The nature of the numerous agencies involved is diffuse and ranges from governmental to local, from statutory to voluntary, from prevention through treatment to criminal justice; as a consequence, there is an urgent need for a common room where information can be exchanged and consensus achieved. A consensus that may drive optimum policy directed towards one of the main challenges to our society today.

'[Substancemisuse.net](http://Substancemisuse.net)' was a welcome addition to our family, but if we were looking to sit back and enjoy our 2.5 children we were soon to be challenged by the arrival of another wee 'un'. [Drugs in Sport](http://Drugs in Sport) <<http://drugsinsport.net>> is the latest addition. Over the past two years, I had noticed how often substance misuse was involved in sport and I suggested to my two colleagues that I thought there was scope for another Web site devoted to this topic. David and Ash agreed immediately (being dedicated coach potato sport fans), and the rest, as they say, is history.

If there is one lesson to be taken from this triptych it is the realisation that there is a demand for dedicated news portals in many fields. For the reasons highlighted above, we believe that placing the person back into the process has delivered what the electronic news service could not, a service that can 'feel' what the reader wants and can search it out and present it on a plate.

**BON APPETIT**

## Teaching and learning in clinical contexts: a resource for health professionals

<<http://www.clinicalteaching.nhs.uk>>

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*Teaching and learning for health-related professionals is based predominantly on clinical experience, but many of those who teach have not had any training to help them make the best use of experiential learning.*

This Web-based programme is a resource for healthcare professionals who want to enhance their skills and understand more about teaching and learning. The programme is open and accessible to health professionals worldwide and aims to provide an introduction to teaching and learning for those who are new to teaching as well as offering useful information for experienced clinical teachers. Teaching materials are freely accessible. However, to take advantage of all the features and to gain CPD points requires registration. Registration is free.

The programme has been designed to meet the needs of those teaching or training at undergraduate or postgraduate level with a practical focus underpinned by educational theory. It is part of an initiative led by the London Deanery to develop Web-based educational packages to support the generic training of doctors and other healthcare workers, e.g. in Appraisal Skills <<http://www.appraisal-skills.com>>, Communication Skills, Ethics and Law, Patient Safety and Learning Within the Clinical Workplace.

A personalised certificate of completion will be available to those completing each module for inclusion in personal development portfolios. Arrangements are also being made for CPD points to be linked to participation. The programme includes two sets of modules.

The **Understanding Teaching and Learning (UTL)** modules cover core aspects of teaching and learning in the clinical context. **The Practical Applications in Clinical Settings (PACS)** modules focus on teaching and learning in different clinical contexts.

Arrangements are also being made for CPD points to be linked to participation

The project has been led by Dr Shelley Heard, Dean of Postgraduate Medicine at the London Deanery and managed by Judy McKimm, Head of Curriculum Development at Imperial College School of Medicine. The project Steering Group is chaired by Dr Diana Wood, Deputy Dean for Education at Bart's and the Royal London Medical School. Steering Group membership includes representatives from each of the medical schools in London and from the Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences at Kingston University.

## Surgeons' News

*Surgeons' News* <<http://www.surgeonsnews.info/>> is an electronic magazine that attempts to improve communication with all of those involved with surgery, particularly Fellows and Members of The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. *Surgeons' News* aims to provide the reader with a broad view on many surgical professional issues that affect modern surgery around the world.