



View from the front line – medical Weblogs

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An introduction to medical Weblogs, with links to individual blogs.

The Internet is renowned as a fiery frontier town where the rule of law is often difficult to enforce. One useful by-product is that free speech, within reason and within the laws of libel, is proudly protected. People can speak their mind or more precisely can write it and share it with the rest of the world. Since the dawn of the Internet, people have taken advantage of the freedoms afforded by cyberspace technology, coupled with the ease of cheaply reaching a global audience, to make personal statements on any topic. Initially, Web sites sprang up all over the place, but the technical problems of maintaining them left them half finished or 'under construction' as the banners would proudly announce. So along came Weblogs, or blogs for short, and their big advantage was that these Web publishing tools were simplicity itself and the author just concentrated on producing the content.

So what exactly are Weblogs (their original name) or blogs (their shorter and more used name)? Well effectively they are online diaries/journals with links to other Web sites appropriate to the content and of course that content is usually a personal statement or opinion. Often these blogs are updated frequently and, whilst many make interesting and fascinating reading (and others are just ramblings), this means a significant time commitment to keep these sites fresh with regular new content. Even better, because the tools required to make these blogs are easily accessible and very user friendly, anyone can set up and maintain a blog. Nowadays, the variety and scale of blogs are huge and within this mass there are some good medical and health ones.

Of course this begs the question, why do people, especially busy health professionals, want to spend their spare time maintaining these online journals? Well there are a multitude of reasons and they include the desire to be published and state personal opinions.

Often these opinions may be highly critical of a feature of the system they are working in and, not surprisingly, the real identity of the author may not be disclosed. The ease and cheapness of setting up and maintaining them (apart from the author's time) is hugely attractive, plus of course the option of reaching out to a global audience. For the audience, especially a busy health professional, the most appropriate blog can be an attractive, informative and educational tool. A daily visit, reading the opinions and checking out a good quality link, may take just a few minutes but can be fun and a learning experience.

A recent excellent review on medical Weblogs has been published by *American Medical News*.¹ Here is a quick tour of some of the medical blogs that I sometimes check out.

medpundit

<<http://www.medpundit.blogspot.com>>

This is a terrific and vibrant site that I am well acquainted with. Interestingly, the author is anonymous in case any of the patients come across the site. It is written by a US-based primary care physician and comments on medical current events and news, often found in the lay press. There are posts appearing almost every day and it is of fascinating interest to both patients and doctors. This is a super example of a medical blog. It is lively, with many personal comments on contemporary events, a good spread of links and a well designed main page. A long scroll down the home page reveals recent posts. There is a link to longer posts in the left-hand margin ('logorrhea') and a great collection of links to other medical blogs. The author's views are usually very reasoned and the work and effort that goes into the production of such a site is immense.

Medical Weblogs

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

This is an essential visit for those new to the blogging experience and a great

introduction to the subject. On the top right of the home page is a link to many of the well-known medical and health blogs. The rest of the site is devoted to taking the latest three postings from these sites. This concept is a great introduction to the many sites available and from here users can choose which one to log onto on a more regular basis. Or a user can check this out daily and see what is happening and click onto anything worth reading. It would make an ideal home page.

Family Medicine Notes

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

For a punchy look at what is new in the world of medicine with a good sprinkling of links to some quality clinical resources, look no further than here. What is best about this site is that a broad range of (mainly US based) clinical topics is covered which makes it an interesting and easy way to keep up to date. A daily visit and a check of the links is a painless yet fun way to learn.

If these three choices do not stimulate your interest, then check out the links section from **<<http://www.medlogs.com>>** and hopefully something will attract your attention. Yahoo! also provides a list of links to Medical blogs **<http://dir.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/World_Wide_Web/Weblogs/Health_and_Medicine/>**.

The only downside is that I cannot find a UK-based purely medical blog. Either I am unable to find it or it does not exist. However if you know different please let me know and I will feature it in a future column.

REFERENCE

1. Cook B. Welcome to the blogosphere: a brave new world of Web dialogue. *American Medical News* 28 April 2003. **<http://www.ama-assn.org/sci-pubs/amnews/pick_03/bisa0428.htm>** [accessed 15/06/03]