

Genetic Information on the WWW: Is it accurate?

More and more, lay people, as well as medical professionals are turning to the internet for information. It is common, when faced with the need for medical information or onset of new symptoms, we turn to the web for information, "googling" and "wikipediaing", searching for knowledge and reassurance. Is the information on the web accurate?



A recent study, published in the medical journal "Genetics in Medicine"¹ says "yes" and "no" — probably not too surprising to the professional medical community, but that answer does complicate the lives of many physicians trying to provide medical care to patients—many of whom have genetic conditions of either early or late onset.

The aim of the study was to determine the accuracy and efficiency of internet resources to help non-geneticists answer four clinical questions about common genetic conditions. Results showed that 33% of databases showed either incomplete answers or no information at all (34%); the best available database, GeneReviews (www.genetests.com) contained complete answers 70% of the time; the worst of the databases included in the study had no complete answers to the questions used.

Of concern was the finding that five of seven "subscription databases" (such as PIER (Physician's Information and Education Resource) and First Consult) had a total of 8 wrong answers. Search time took from 3.2 to 18.3 minutes, interesting, in light of the fact that the average physician spends less than 2 minutes searching for the answer for a medical-related question.²

PAML is working hard to be an accurate and quickly available genetics resource to our physicians and hospital clients; we particularly recommend the website listed above as a great place to obtain genetic education and information. Look for further updates and links from this website to other places where information is accurate and hopefully helpful to clinical practice.

1. "Twenty questions in genetic medicine—an assessment of World Wide Web databases for genetics information at the point of care". *Genetics in Medicine*:10(9):659, '08.

2. "Information needs and information-seeking behavior of primary care physicians". *Annals of Family Medicine*: 5:345, '07.

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