

Using Technology to Improve Your Wound-care Practice

Part I: The Internet

This is the first in a series of articles on how the use of technology can enhance your wound-care practice.



BY Douglas Queen

Communication technologies, from the printing press, to the telephone, to computers and the Internet, have been changing our lives for some considerable time. Even though we recognize that such technological tools can dramatically improve our lives, we need to be aware of the need to anticipate and manage their consequences. This is particularly true in health-care areas, where technology and medical knowledge are both advancing so rapidly that we can often be left behind.

Computers have been around for many years now, but they have only truly impacted our home and work lives for the past 20 years, with the most significant effect only in the last five years or so. This has resulted mainly from the advent of the Internet. While it has been around for most of the 1980s, mostly as a global academic network, the Internet has only recently become a public commodity.

Initially, the Internet was mostly used for electronic mail. This essentially allowed users to exchange text messages across the globe, usually in a matter of minutes, or, with today's broadband, seconds! However, it was probably the advent of the World Wide Web that

triggered the recent growth of the Internet. Here users can access a variety of information — from the bizarre and inaccurate, to the most up-to-date information available from scientific bodies and academic journals. These users include patients and their families.

Health Information on the Internet

A recent report¹ has indicated that a large percentage of people of all ages are turning to the Internet to look for health information for themselves and their families (see Table 1).

The research company surveyed over 4,500 adults in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S., and found that 57 per cent of the respondents over the age of 55 had consulted Internet sources when looking for health information, as had around 50 per cent of the 35-54 age group. This is a significant group, which can be tapped for research and are seeking educational help.

A further study by Harris Interactive and the Harris Poll² demonstrated some differences geographically but also confirmed a significant audience for health-related materials (Table 2).

Glossary

Internet: The Internet is an international network of computers. The services most commonly accessed on the Internet are e-mail, the Web, newsgroups, mailing lists (listservs), chat rooms, Telnet and FTP functions.

World Wide Web: The World Wide Web, or more commonly, the Web, is one component of the Internet. It uses protocols and formats that are compatible with the majority of the world's computers.

**Douglas Queen,
BSc, PhD, MBA,**

is the CEO and President
of Medicalhelpline.com
Inc, Toronto, ON

The Internet as a Resource

The Internet is an immense, rapidly accessible educational research resource. It can dramatically enhance an individual's ability to self-educate and is becoming paramount in the area of continuing medical education.

The Internet is a valuable source of information, but due to the volume of information available one has to be strategic in its use to obtain the appropriate information in the most efficient manner. This article presents background information on how to look and where to look for wound-care-specific information. The goal for a busy health-care practitioner: minimizing surfing time but maximizing the information return.

Several new Web sites have been designed with the wound-care provider in mind. They have a specific niche focus on wound care and bring the user to gateways that allow both educational and product information to be accessed with minimal surfing with a high level of interactivity. Specific chat sites and bulletin boards (discussion forums) are also available, bringing further interactivity to its users.

Through these new wound-care-focused Web sites, one can participate in both education and wound-care-specific research studies, where users can be asked, via e-mail, to complete Internet-based surveys related to wound care. In addition they can provide a number of educational resources and, in essence, take the effort out of surfing.

The Future of the Internet in Health Care

The Internet will be the next major paradigm change in the delivery of both health-care and health-related information. Telemedicine and electronic health records are to become a reality and in some instances have already become so. Specialized resources related to wound-care education are becoming readily available and, indeed, some continuing medical education sites exist today. Future offerings will provide formal online education resources.

The ABCs of the Internet

As wound-care professionals you know it is important to be up-to-date on the information available to enhance your practice. This is necessary not only to stay abreast of recent developments or to further your own educational

needs, but also to be aware of the information readily available to, and routinely accessed by, your patients.

Although we may feel that such resources are for another generation, namely our children, the reality is that as we become elderly and experience the physiological consequences of age, we require an understanding of what's going wrong. Recent studies have confirmed that the largest population of individuals seeking health-care related information on the Internet is the elderly.

Ask – The better search engines can help but often require significant surfing to find what you want.

Believe – Specialized wound-care Web sites or wound-care associations can be better starting points. The newer sites bring enhanced Internet use and provide ready access to relevant information for wound-care users. The CAWC Web site is a case in point.

Chat sites and bulletin boards can also be good interactive resources to communicate with others facing the same issues on a daily basis.

And don't forget the companies serving the wound-care arena; many have educationally focused Web sites with impartial information.

Surfing Recommendations

To help you use the Internet effectively to improve your wound-care practice, check out the Web Resource

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References

1. Who is Looking for Health Information Online? A Segmentation Analysis of the Online Consumer, Datamonitor Report BFHC0470. Sept. 2002.
2. Four-nation survey shows widespread but different levels of Internet use for health purposes. *Harris Interactive Health Care News*. Volume 2, Issue 11. 2002.

TABLE 1

Internet Habits by Age Group

Online Activities	% of 18-34 years	% of 35-54 years	% of 55+ years
Received and sent e-mail	92	95	97
Used the Internet to get the daily news	45	51	55
Visited Web sites/online channels about health	39	49	57
Read through or posted on Message Boards	24	22	25

Source: Datamonitor Report¹

Guide below. Many more resources exist, but those listed are good places to start. Also you may find the following tips good to remember when you're looking for wound-care-related information:

1. Start with a specialized wound-care site (e.g., www.woundcarehelpline.com).
2. Ensure that you check out the links section for other resources.
3. Follow this up with a wound-care association (often in the links area).
4. Next check out a manufacturer to see if they have an educational area.
5. Interact with others through a chat site (e.g., www.woundchat.com).
6. If you still haven't found what you want, use a search engine.

Don't be frightened of the Internet; enjoy it and benefit from the wealth of information freely available. Allow it to help you help your patients — remember, they do! ☺

TABLE 2

Health Information Seekers by Geography

Incidence of Health Seekers in the Big Four Pharmaceutical Markets: January 2002

	U.S.	France	Germany	Japan
Online population (% of all adults)	66%	35%	44%	42%
% of all those online who ever looked for health-care information on the Internet	80%	69%	86%	90%
% of all adults who ever looked for health-care information on the Internet	53%	24%	38%	38%
Number of adults who ever looked for health-care information on the Internet	110M	14M	31M	48M

Source: Global Cyberchondriacs Study, Harris Interactive, January 2002, and the Harris Poll, March 2002

Web Resource Guide

Search Engines

Yahoo www.yahoo.ca
Google www.google.ca
Look.com www.look.com
PubMed www.pubmed.com
Medline Plus www.medlineplus.com
MedicineNet.com
www.medicinenet.com
Med411.com www.med411.com

Specialized Sites

Woundcarehelpline.com
www.woundcarehelpline.com
World Wide Wounds
www.worldwidewounds.com
WCIN www.medicaledu.com
Wound Tx.com www.woundtx.com
Wounds1.com www.wounds1.com

Associations

Canadian Association of Wound Care
www.cawc.net
AAWC www.aawc1.com
EWMA www.ewma.org
AAWM.org www.aawm.org
Wound Care Society
www.woundcaresociety.org
European Tissue Repair Society
www.etrso.org
Wound Healing Society
www.woundheal.org
Chat Sites and Journals
WoundChat.com www.woundchat.com
Wound Care Canada www.cawc.net
Wound Repair and Regeneration
www.blackwellpublishing.com
International Wound Journal
www.blackwellpublishing.com
Wounds www.woundresearch.com

Ostomy/Wound Management

www.o-wm.com

Skin & Wound Care

www.woundcarenet.com

Wound Care

www.journalofwoundcare.com

Educational Resources and Companies with Educational Components

TWHC www.twhc.ca
Wound Healing Research Unit
www.whru.co.uk
Smith + Nephew
www.woundbedpreparation.com
Global Wound Academy
www.globalwoundacademy.com
Hollister www.hollister.com
Johnson & Johnson Gateway
www.advancedwoundcare.com
3M www.mmm.com
Tendra www.tendra.com



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