

12-2010

Wandering the Web -- To Your Good Health: Health Websites for Parents, Teens, and Kids

Carol L. Watwood

Western Kentucky University, carol.watwood@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlps_fac_pub



Part of the [Public Health Education and Promotion Commons](#)

Recommended Repository Citation

Watwood, Carol L.. (2010). Wandering the Web -- To Your Good Health: Health Websites for Parents, Teens, and Kids. *Against the Grain*, December 2010-January 2011, 12,-14.

Original Publication URL: <http://www.against-the-grain.com>

Available at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlps_fac_pub/35

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in DLPS Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

I Hear the Train A Comin' from page 10

publications and content sources can seem overwhelming. But many institutions are navigating through these difficult issues, even as they sometimes stumble along the way. But does this constitute a crisis? An opportunity or, again, a challenge feels like a better word.

From the publishers' standpoint, there was less terminological ambiguity. No respondent felt that there is a crisis at this point. Again, there are weighty issues to be confronted, particularly by learned societies and smaller publishers that are unable or ill-equipped to adapt to industry changes such as digital workflows, online discovery tools, and alternative business models. These struggles may have unforeseen consequences within the broader scholarly communication realm over the longer term, of course. As one respondent points out, "If these niche publications are an important part of the ecosystem, what happens when they disappear? What happens to their authors and their readers? Are they as well or better served in larger consolidated publications, or by some other form of publication entirely?" These are good questions that we would be wise to keep an eye on.

Again, to be clear, no respondent painted a smiley face on our industry's current state of affairs. There are serious concerns that impact both libraries and publishers. However, the general consensus was that crisis is too strong a word.

Does traditional scholarly publishing matter?

There was near unanimity among the group that traditional scholarly publishing still matters. The emphasis, though, was on the function of the publisher, not the form. The publisher serves as a tool to disseminate information, to connote legitimacy on new ideas and arguments, to ensure certain standards of peer review, to collect materials bound together by certain characteristics and make that content discoverable, and so forth. These functions, in turn, inform decisions about tenure and promotion, research funding, hiring, and other essential elements of the research world.

Many of the respondents, however, questioned the traditional forms of scholarly publishing. For example, do monographs still matter? Does subscription-based print distribution still matter? What about the packaging of a traditional article in a traditional journal? On these points, our panel was less certain. The conventional role of the scholarly publisher remains very relevant, in their eyes, even as the means by which that role is fulfilled may be changing.

To quote one of the respondents, "If 'traditional' means publishers certifying trustworthy content and maintaining and stewarding the scholarly record, then it's more important than ever. The Web is awash with junk and there needs to be a filter. Formats will change, data is becoming more important, semantic tagging, blogs, and wikis are all having a huge impact, but nothing looks close to replacing peer review and

the idea of the Version of Record as the backbone of our system."

In one word, how would you describe the future of scholarly communication?

The answers to this question were as follows, listed alphabetically: different, dynamic, exciting (twice), experimental, flux, multi-faceted, necessary, network, reinvention (twice), torrent, and vital.

It is interesting that these one-word responses foresee an environment that is fertile, interesting, challenging, complex, and unwritten. This is what I will take away from this roundtable exercise. Scholarly communication — driven in part by technology, in part by economics, and in part by the insight and acumen of people like our panelists, and like you in our audience, for that matter — is in a fascinating period of reinvention. This transformation is in part due to the lessons we have learned over a prolonged period of crisis, but it goes beyond that. We have talked about so many of these issues for such a long time, and now the focus seems to be shifting toward action. Innovations in business models and content delivery are here. We are experimenting with better ways to process and make sense of disparate forms of information. We are developing and implementing tools to make every step of the scholarly communications process more efficient. Not all of these efforts will succeed, and even the ones that do will have their trials along the way. But it is terrific to see the enthusiasm with which our collective future is being met. ☘

Wandering the Web — To Your Good Health: Health Websites for Parents, Teens, and Kids

by Carol Watwood (Health Sciences Librarian, Western Kentucky University Libraries)

Column Editor: Jack G. Montgomery (Coordinator, Collection Services, Western Kentucky University Libraries)
<jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

Who Googles a diagnosis? Dr. Mom, that's who! Parents are more likely than non-parents to look for health information online, and women with children under 18 are the most frequent online seekers of medical information. According to a 2002 survey, 72% of online mothers and 57% of online fathers had searched for health information on the Web.¹ Many parents look for disease or health conditions affecting their children. 31% of teens also say they look for health information online; they search for health, dieting, fitness, and "sensitive health topics."² Health information searchers begin more often with a search engine (66%) than with a health-related Website (27%); many admit they don't check the source and date of the information they find.³

How can kids (and their parents) separate the good from the bad? The Medical Library Association has produced "A User's Guide to Finding and Evaluating Health Information on the Web," available free online at <http://www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html>. Another source of information is the Health on the Net Foundation (<http://www.hon.ch/home1.html>), which certifies health and medical Websites with the "HONcode" designation for reliability and trustworthiness. However, not all credible sites participate, and HONcode sites may not contain the needed information on an age-appropriate level. In general, ask: who sponsors or pays for the Website and why? What are the authors' credentials, where did they get their information, and when was it written? Do expert editors review the content? If they link to other sites, how are these sites selected? Is information complete and unbiased; is advertising content clearly separated from other content? Are users asked to buy anything; if they must register, how is personal information used? Other "red flags" are unsolicited emails, "miracle" or "secret" cures, and "diet supplements" for complex conditions

such as autism, hyperactivity, cancer, or obesity. Even high-quality health Websites require critical thinking; they supplement rather than replace face-to-face visits to health professionals.

Child/teen health Websites fall into two groups (1) those targeted mainly to adults and (2) sites meant for kids/teens. Kids' Websites such as **Tox Town** and **BAM!** are becoming more visually appealing and are utilizing the unique capabilities of the Web rather than trying to copy print encyclopedias. Some teen sites are suited to school and library settings; others are designed for recreational use and/or contain controversial or sexually explicit materials.

The U.S. government is a top producer of quality kids' health information (.gov sites); so are universities (.edu) and professional organizations (.org). Not all .org sites are nonprofit or high-quality; some commercial sites (.com) are subtle or not-so-subtle sales pitches, while others are highly-regarded.

Sites for Parents and School Assignments

MedlinePlus — <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/> — The most comprehensive of all consumer health Websites, the U.S. National Library of Medicine's **MedlinePlus** has something for kids of all ages. If you only use one consumer health site, **MedlinePlus** should be the one — information is reviewed for quality and numerous links to other carefully-selected Website are provided. Articles are information-dense; except for those designated "easy to read," most are suited to educated adults. **MedlinePlus** has an A-Z encyclopedia, drug and supplement index, dictionary, doctor/dentist/facility finders, news, patient handouts, slideshows, videos, quizzes for kids and adults, Spanish and ASL materials, and more. "Evaluating health informa-

continued on page 14

tion" explains how to find quality medical information on the Web. For older teens, **MedlinePlus** is a good source for school projects.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — <http://www.cdc.gov/> — The CDC Website is another massive source of health information. The "Education" section has a section for K-12 listing kid-friendly health sites. The "Adolescent Health" section lists teen health topics; "Parent Portal" is for parents of kids ages 4-11. The CDC site emphasizes public health issues such as kids' anti-obesity campaigns, environmental health, and infectious disease prevention. CDC has links to kids' activities and podcasts.

American Academy of Pediatrics — <http://www.aap.org/> — and **Companion Parents' Website** — <http://www.healthychildren.org/>. Authoritative pediatrics site; includes pediatrician finder. Child health public policy issues, child advocacy, public health issues, and other child health issues such as immunization, obesity, and automobile safety. Some parts of the site are members-only or require subscriptions.

NOAH (New York Online Access to Health) Children's Health — <http://www.noah-health.org/en/healthy/children/> — NOAH is a high-quality English/Spanish site established in October 1994 by four New York City library organizations. The volunteer editors (librarians and health professionals) do not write the material; they find, select, and organize existing sources, which are reviewed by a content committee. NOAH began as a demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce; it is still partially funded by the **Federal Library Services and Technology Act**. The site accepts no advertising (although some links have ads); information includes wellness, diseases, and other information resources. NOAH's page layout is plain and adult-oriented, with A-Z lists of topics.

HealthDay — <http://www.healthday.com/> — Widely-licensed news service (used by **MedlinePlus**, healthfinder.gov, and other top sites) produces 18-20 health stories per day from government announcements, medical journals, industry, scientific conferences, and other sources. Also has FDA approvals and health tips. Archives are searchable by keyword, category, and topic. A children's health news feed is available. **HealthDay** is also in Spanish.

Healthfinder.gov — <http://healthfinder.gov/> — A service of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, healthfinder.gov is a federally-funded locator service for health information from selected government and nonprofit sources. Content is selected and reviewed by a steering committee led by the **Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**. Children's health topics may be searched by keyword or selected from an A-Z list.

WebMD Children's Health — <http://children.webmd.com/> — A popular, attractive site, **WebMD** is produced by a physician/journalist editorial team and reviewed by physicians. **WebMD** offers many entertaining features to engage users, such as quizzes, games, videos, slideshows, point-and-click menus, online discussions, and links to social media. Advertising content is clearly marked and placed separately on the page. The **WebMD** "family" also includes **MedicineNet, Inc.** (a physician-produced consumer health site), **eMedicine** (a point-of-care reference for health professionals), and **Medscape** (a site for health professionals containing news, CME, and other resources).

FamilyDoctor.org Parents & Kids — <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/children.html> — Operated by the **American Academy of Family Physicians**, **FamilyDoctor.org** is subtitled "health information for the whole family." A "Parents and Kids" section covers children's health. The colorful look of **FamilyDoctor.org** is somewhat like its sister site, **KidsHealth.org**, except that **FamilyDoctor.org** accepts advertisements; these are clearly marked and separated from other content. A Spanish version is available.

Sites for Use by Kids

KidsHealth.org — <http://www.kidshealth.org/> — **KidsHealth** is a "family" of high-quality physician-reviewed sites run by the pediatrician-led **Nemours Center for Children's Health Media**. Separate "Parents," "Kids," and "Teens" sections address different audiences. Content is adult-written with colorful graphics. A Spanish-language version is included. The **KidsHealth** sites are a family-friendly choice for school and public libraries.

Kids.gov: Health — <http://www.kids.gov/> — Subtitled "The Official Kids' Portal for the U.S. Government," **kids.gov** has separate sections for grades K-5, grades 6-8, and educators. Links to other sites for fitness and exercise, health issues, safety, and careers are included. Songs, games, and activities for classroom use are included. Younger kids will need help in navigating **kids.gov**. Some materials have Spanish-language versions.

BAM! Body and Mind — <http://www.bam.gov/> — **BAM!**, a service of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a site for "healthy lifestyle choices" targeted to kids 9 to 13. Created by educators

and health and fitness professionals, it teaches kids about stress, safety, physical fitness, a healthy immune system, and wellness using cartoons, quizzes, and games. Many activities are suitable for classroom use; teaching materials are provided.

Tox Town — <http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/> — **Tox Town**, a fun interactive Website produced by the U.S. National Library of Medicine and devoted to environmental health, is targeted to "students above elementary school level, educators, and the general public." The user clicks a link to make a human talk, hear a cow moo, make rats scurry, see tractors smoke, and view detailed environmental information from **MedlinePlus** and other sites. Users may select a setting (farm, town, city, harbor, U.S.-Mexican border) and learn about environmental health issues for each one. **Tox Town** is a good site for classroom use, but the linked printed material may be too hard to read for younger kids. Text-only and Spanish versions are available.

Sites for Teens

TeensHealth — <http://kidshealth.org/teen/> — **TeensHealth** is the teen portion of **KidsHealth**, produced by the nonprofit **Nemours Center for Children's Health Media**. Written and reviewed by physicians and other health professionals, **TeensHealth** educates teens with about health conditions, fitness, body changes during puberty, sexual health, and other issues. Includes healthy recipes for teens, including those with diabetes and other health conditions. **TeensHealth** is also in Spanish.

Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers — <http://www.teenhealthandwellness.com/> — **Teen Health & Wellness** is a subscription Website produced by **Rosen Publishing Online**, a publisher of self-help materials. *Library Journal* chose this site as one of its "Best Reference Sources" in 2007. "**Teen Health & Wellness** is oriented toward educational use by teens in grades 6 through 12, and materials support curricular guidelines. Information is written by adults in conjunction with a teen advisory board and reviewed by an expert medical team. Articles are short, readable, and presented in a clean, attractive layout. Topics include diseases, mental health, and related issues of common interest to teens; subjects such as Internet privacy are also included.

Go Ask Alice! — <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/> — The oldest major health Website, "**Go Ask Alice!**" began in October 1993 (a month after the advent of the World Wide Web) as a Q&A site for **Columbia University** students. On this immensely popular site, the staff of counselors, social workers, and other specialists at the **Alice! Health Promotion Program** at **Columbia University**, a.k.a. "**Alice**," answer questions about sexuality, personal relationships, drugs, fitness, and general health. Targeted to older teens and young adults "**Alice**" is "a health Q&A Internet resource that works to provide readers with reliable, accurate, accessible, culturally competent information so that they can make informed decisions" (from the site's **Facebook** page). "**Alice**" is lively, youth-oriented, and contains sexually explicit and controversial material.

Planned Parenthood Teen Talk — <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/teen-talk/> — "**Teen Talk**" is the teen-oriented portion of **Planned Parenthood**, an international nonprofit organization. It provides English/Spanish information about birth control, abortion, sexual health, and women's health. Health care providers and services are also listed. "**Teen Talk**" also has pages on **Facebook** and **MySpace**. "**Teen Talk**" also links to parents' and educators' pages.

Sex, Etc. — <http://www.sexetc.org/> — Based at **Rutgers University**, **Sex, Etc.** is subtitled "Sex Education by Teens, for Teens!" It is sponsored by **Answer**, (formerly the **Network for Family Life Education**), begun in 1981 by a member of the New Jersey Board of Education and now nationwide. **Sex, Etc.** is a long-running site focusing on sexual health written by teens and reviewed by medical experts. **Sex, Etc.** contains sexually explicit material.

TeenHealthFX — <http://www.teenhealthfx.com/> — Colorful, popular site begun in 1999 and co-produced by adults and teens for **Atlantic Health**. Includes local information for northern New Jersey (some for-profit) but also general interest. Links to other teen Websites, including health sites. Questions and answers by category (health and illness, emotional health, etc.) with searchable archives. Includes sexually explicit material. ☞

Endnotes

1. "Parents Online. Pew Internet & American Life Project, November 2002. Accessed May 7, 2010, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/>.
2. "Teens & the Internet: the future of digital diversity." March 23, 2010. Accessed May 7, 2010, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2010/Mar/Fred-Forward.aspx>.
3. "Online health search 2006." Accessed May 7, 2010, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2006/Online-Health-Search-2006.aspx>.