

Systematic reviews and social media: can wiki technology be used as a publishing platform in medicine?

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This month marks an exciting development at Open Medicine, and an experiment of sorts in medical publishing, with the publication of our first systematic review using wiki technology. [1]

Among social media, wikis offer a promising and efficient way to create dynamic repositories of medical knowledge through the use of a platform and a means of collaborative authoring. Wikipedia, the popular online encyclopedia, is emblematic of the success of collaborative authoring. And while the underlying technology to create wikis is now regularly employed in medical projects of all kinds, rarely has it been used to update a traditional medical publication.

One publication that requires continuous updating is the systematic review, widely-seen as a key tool in evidence-based practice. However, as systematic reviews may go out of date as new research is published, journals may not publish newer versions until a significant amount of time has elapsed.

Deshpande and colleagues ([link to wiki](#)) see a great deal of untapped potential in using wiki technology. By allowing researchers, in fact anyone, to edit without the usual approval needed is potentially revolutionary. By allowing anyone to edit, contentious points in a review are likely to undergo closer scrutiny and monitoring by peers. In effect, by allowing experts in the field to peer review themselves, the responsibility for accuracy shifts away from editors to those with the requisite expertise and knowledge.

However, it must be said that the open nature of wikis makes them controversial and occasionally problematic. [2] Some researchers believe that wikis are not universally applicable in science where the highest levels of accuracy and standards must be maintained to ensure human safety. [3] That said, three expert-moderated wikis in medicine, AskDrWiki, Ganfyd and the recently launched Medpedia, are changing some of the negative perceptions of using this technology in our field.

Like all publications in Open Medicine, the systematic review by Deshpande *et al* has undergone the usual rigorous peer review and editing process. For future comparisons with an edited version, we have published and archived an original version of the article. This will allow us to identify how the wiki has been used and the impact the technology has had on the evolution of research content. We may publish other archived versions in the future when, or if, the review is materially different from its original version.

Our collaborative work at Open Medicine in utilizing web 2.0 tools reflects our commitment to innovation in medical publishing as well as our commitment to

openness and transparency. Like our unique use of open source software to publish Open Medicine [4], we take seriously our mandate to push the boundaries of medical publishing and new technologies to for knowledge generation. As such, we would like to thank Deshpande and colleagues, and the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technology in Health, for their creative inspiration to develop the wiki and their practical support in getting this exciting new venture on-line.

Without tradition or external commitments to fetter the creative spirit, Open Medicine is in a position to explore how we can improve or even revolutionize medical publishing: we are limited only by your ideas and willingness to share and explore them.

References

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