(http://www.ecu.edu.au)

PERTH: 8:30am f 🐦 ▶ in
(/social-circle/overview)

FEEDBACK (/SUPPLEMENTAL/WEBSITE-FEEDBACK)   PREFERENCES (/SUPPLEMENTAL/WEBSITE-PREFERENCES)

Search website, course offerings, research, staff directory

A TO Z INDEX (/SUPPLEMENTAL/SITEMAP)   CONTACT US (/SUPPLEMENTAL/CONTACT-US)   MAPS (/SUPPLEMENTAL/CAMPU

STUDENT/STAFF P
(HTTP://WWW.ECU

ABOUT ECU (/ABOUT-ECU)   FUTURE STUDENTS (/FUTURE-STUDENTS)   RESEARCH (/RESEARCH)   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (/COMMUNITY)   MOST P

EDITH MAGAZINE

Help us improve our content by rating this page.

🏠 ECU Home (http://www.ecu.edu.au) > News (http://www.ecu.edu.au/news) > Edith Magazine (http://www.ecu.edu.au/news/edith-magazine) > Articles (http://www.ecu.edu.au/news/edith-magazine/articles)

Google Doctor it's popular but is it accurate?

Tuesday, 24 June 2014

When people's health is an issue – and it almost always is – they want information that is accurate and they can trust. Today, that means many turn to Dr Google before their GP, writes Associate Professor Trevor Cullen.

The interest in online health information has witnessed an explosive increase in the past 15 years. Pew Research Centre says that in 2000 an internet search with the keywords 'online health information' would have retrieved nearly 70,000 related websites.

Today, the same search leads to more than 54 million related websites. In Australia, searching for health and medical information was among the top 10 internet activities for online Australians over 16 years of age in 2011, mostly through search engines Google, Bing or Yahoo.

"They are making serious health decisions based on what they view and read online." They are not just searching, either. Instead, they are making serious health decisions based on what they view and read online.

Last year the Health Online 2013 study revealed that 81 per cent of American adults used the internet and 59 per cent said they searched online for health information in the past year.

Six out of 10 said the information they found online affected their decision about how to treat an illness or a medical condition.

Can "Google Doctor" be trusted?

But among the millions of websites that offer health-related information, there are many that present myths and half-truths as if they are facts.

It seems that nearly every week there is a new theory on whether, for instance, the daily use of aspirin is effective or detrimental, or whether broccoli is a v slow the spread of certain cancers.

And even if health professionals and patients are becoming more efficient at sourcing information online, it cannot be assumed that both types of users ca efficiently search and distinguish between websites offering good quality, evidence-based health information from those offering poor advice.

It is a problem that the Medical Library Association, based in the US, is trying to tackle by rating websites for reliability, including whether they offer eviden online health information.

The criteria used by the MLA to test whether websites offer reliable health information include four key basic questions that each consumer should ask wh the net:

Where did this information come from?

Any website that provides health-related information should tell you the source of the information.

How current is the information?

Look for dates on documents and possible broken links.

Is it peer- reviewed and evidence-based? Rely on medical research and not opinions.

While Google may claim to offer the broadest index of websites, other types of search engines, such as meta and medical portals may offer a better return relevant websites.

Who is responsible for the content of the website?

Look for the link that says "about us" and find the person or organisation who is responsible for the information on the site. Health-related websites publish government (.gov), or a non-profit organisation (.org) are often more reliable sources as well as health links on international news sites like the BBC or AB

In 2006, two Australian researchers, Hangwi Tang and Jennifer Hwee Kwoon Ng, published research in the British Medical Journal concluding that while engine like Google is a quick and easy preliminary research tool, it should be seen as providing direction for further confirmation before diagnosis.

Freely available resources such as PubMed, they said, provide "high quality indexing that once mastered, will ensure greater precision and higher calibre results for every type of health query".

I would support those findings and argue that health information on a website should not replace your doctor's advice as he or she is often the best person answer questions about personal health.

It's safer to use what we find on the net as part of an ongoing investigation and conversation rather than make a final decision just on what we read or see

Associate Professor Trevor Cullen lectures in health journalism in the School of Communications and Arts.

Share

| 0 | 2 | 0 | | 0 | Google + | 0 |

Contacting ECU

> Got a Question? Ask Us (/askus)

> Contact Us (/supplemental/contact-us)

> Complaints (/complaints)

> Phone 134 ECU (134 328)

> International: +61 8 6304 0000

> Campus Maps (/supplemental/campus-maps)

Supplemental

> Copyright (/copyright), Disclaimer (/disclaimer), Privacy (/privacy)

> Emergency (/emergency)

> Report errors (/contact)

> Sitemap (/sitemap)

> Last reviewed 24 Jun 2014 (http://www.ecu.edu.au/news/edith-magazine/articles/2014/issue-01/google-doctor-its-popular-but-is-it-accurate)

> CRICOS IPC 00279B (/cricos)

5 STAR GRADUATE SATISFACTION *

That's how university should be

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

(/5star)

* Good Universities Guide 2014